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THE ELIZABETHAN INFLUENCE ON THE TRAGEDY  
OF THE LATE EIGHTEENTH AND THE  
EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURIES

BY

WILLIAM PAGE HARBESON

*University of Pennsylvania*

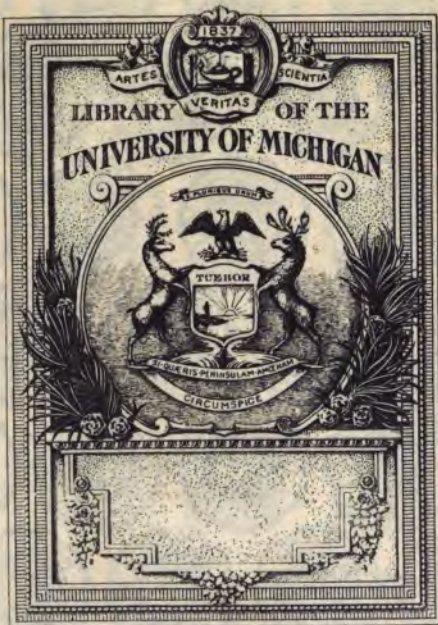
A THESIS

PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN  
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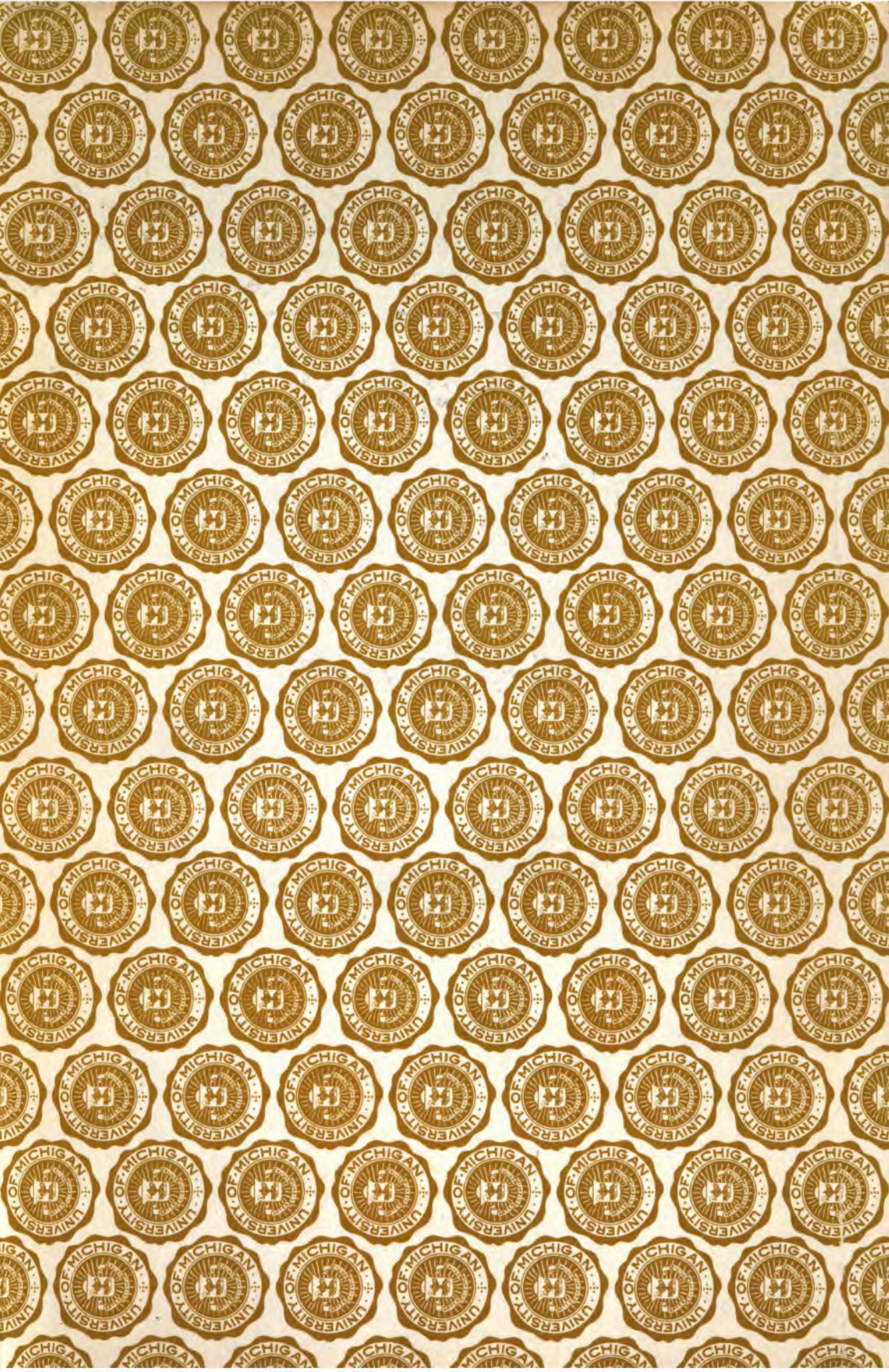
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## INTRODUCTION

THIS work purposes an examination of tragedy during parts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for evidence of an Elizabethan revival. The drama made a considerable contribution to the literature of the Romantic Period. It experienced reaction against the extreme classicism of Pope and Boileau, as did poetry; and like poetry it expressed the reaction in a freer form, a deeper lyric feeling, and an increased appreciation of natural background. That the results in the field of drama are disappointing intrinsically and in quantity with those in other literary fields is due to a set of causes that need not be discussed here. The phenomena, however, were unquestionably present. In the plays of the later eighteenth century one becomes increasingly aware that the ennui of the age and the prosaic character of its life are producing a natural revulsion of feeling; one notices, slightly at first, then very evidently, the influence of romantic forces like the Reliques, the researches of Gray and Warton, the Garrick Shakespeare, and later the strong tides of German romanticism.

Each of these new tendencies pointed back to the glamor of an older time, when life, partly it is true because of retrospect, but partly also because of its inherent qualities, was a colorful pageant, and a happily unlearned people still felt the mystery of existence and wonder about things eternal. Playwrights and poets alike experienced that "Revival of the Middle Ages" that Heine gives as his definition of romance.

The term "Middle Ages," however, is an elastic one. Its

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iconography has been settled now within properly philological and historic limits. But in an age like the Augustan in England, when a certain satisfaction for the present was combined with a contemptuous tolerance of what had gone before, when Milton and Bunyan had to be apologized for and Pope and Johnson passed strictures on the coarseness of Shakespeare,—in such an age the Middle Ages meant almost any time before the happy advent of Charles II, and very often the time of Elizabeth and James. Walpole, explaining the inspiration of the *Castle of Otranto*, asseverated an ambition to re-create the charm of romantic feudal times—and mentioned Shakespeare in the same breath. The revival, in other words, was quite as much a revival of the romanticism of the Renaissance as of the earlier and stricter romanticism, with an increased production of the old plays and later of a natural effort to emulate their success by their means.

The task here will be to examine the dramatic output of the time, first of all for any evidences of reaction against the old order; then for traces of a romantic feeling that suggests the Elizabethan, either unconsciously or consciously. In an analysis of this kind one has no definite measure wherewith to work. There is simply the knowledge of certain peculiarities of form that inhere in the earlier plays; certain definite *types* of drama that are popular; family resemblances in characters and the way of portraying them, and a philosophy underlying the whole fabric that varies greatly in the several tragedies but that can be classed generally and labelled “Elizabethan”. Some of the newer plays will of course be easily classed. It needs no experience to place Hull with the definitely classic school, and influenced largely by Voltaire; or Beddoes with the definitely Elizabethan, influenced by Marston and Tourneur. The difficulty lies between, where there is a mixture of romantic elements and classic, where there are several types

of romantic in combination, or where the influence is not so clearly referable to a definite source.

The matter of time limitations in a case of this kind is not an entirely simple one. The Romantic movement in England was not so clearly defined as it was on the Continent, but rather a series of forces acting with varying intensity over a period of about a hundred years. The natural course in searching for a starting point would seem to be an examination of the early eighteenth century for any striking play or series of plays that, by their success or the criticism they invited, pointed away from the established order.

Working on this principle, one comes early across the name of George Lillo, whose first play was written in 1731. Lillo was a man who had everything in his favor as a potential rebel against dramatic traditions. He was of foreign extraction. He was engaged in trade. Consequently he was not bound up with the literary hierarchy of well-bred gentlemen who wrote most of the drama of the time. He knew the viewpoint of the man of the street, and possibly shared it. The triumph of at least one of his plays proves a definite popular appeal; and the appreciation of Pope and Fielding, and the extended influence of "Barnwell" and "Fatal Curiosity" abroad, are forces that must be reckoned with in any study of the new romance.

Three of the Lillo plays are worth studying from the standpoint of a possible departure from one tradition, and a possible return to an earlier one. They are "George Barnwell", "Fatal Curiosity", and "Arden of Feversham". In the titles themselves there is a simplicity not evident in most of the tragedies of the time; and the last promises something as an index of what an eighteenth-century man would do with a sixteenth-century drama.

George Barnwell has an arresting prologue and address to

the reader, in which the author states his creed and purpose. His premises are these: *first*, that common life is as well suited to tragedy as the life of kings; *secondly*, that prose can express great emotion as well as verse, and being understood by a greater number will achieve, *third*, the inculcation of the moral, which is the chief end of drama.

The theme is taken from an old ballad, and deals with the ruin of a youth by a courtesan, his fall leading to murder and the gallows. In other words, there is the suggestion of a return to the Elizabethan domestic tragedy. The underlying conditions are the same: a story from real life, dealing with middle-class folk, and to be treated with realism. Lillo knew something of this type of tragedy, as is shown by his revision of "Arden", and one questions whether the reading of the old play and others like it led to his own first attempt, or whether the success of his first play led to a search for earlier themes of a similar type. At any rate "Barnwell" presents a strong contrast to the contemporary work of Fenton, Brooke and Hill in the baldness of its narrative, which suggests a tract or court record.<sup>1</sup>

Unquestionably the most compelling character, and the one most like life, is Marwood. She has the evil of Vittoria Corombona with none of her intellect or poetic force; and reminds one a little of Alice in "Arden". The reading is logical; Marwood is wily and cruel to the end; there is no moralizing with her, no deathbed repentance. Here is a suggestion at least of the merciless characters of some of the older domestic dramas.

The other characters suggest many analogues.

<sup>1</sup> "The more extensively useful the moral of a tragedy is the more excellent that piece must be of its kind." (*George Barnwell*, Address to Reader.)

Thoroughgood is the incarnation of prose. He is before all a merchant, a middle-class man who exults in his trade.

"As the name of merchant never degrades the gentleman, so by no means does it exclude him." (Act I, Sc. I)

What imagination he has is given over to argosies and the romance of trade:

"The populous east, luxureant, abounds with glittering gems, bright pearls, aromatic spices, and health-restoring drugs: the late found western world's rich earth glows with unnumbered veins of gold and silver ore. On every climate, and on every country Heaven has bestowed some good peculiar to itself." (Act III, Sc. I)

These two bits of his conversation give also a suggestion of his hobby—a tendency to moralize at all times. One is conscious, too, of a not too pleasant unction, almost an obsequiousness, when parleying about the nobility; for though business may ennoble a man, still there is the old tradesman's respect for rank.

"You are not insensible" (speaking to his daughter, Act I, Sc. I) that it is chiefly on your account that these noble lords do me the honor so frequently to grace my board. Should you be absent, the disappointment may make them repent of their condescension and think their labor lost."

The whole of his conduct and conversation recall Defoe. There is the same ostentatious attention to realistic detail, the same gift for homily. There is a suggestion of Richardson also, and the later novels of purpose; but nothing of the Elizabethan, either in the conception of the man or his character.

Maria and Barnwell offer still other elements. Barnwell,

like his master, philosophizes largely, even when about to commit crime. His character is blurred, the change from innocent youth to criminality being accomplished with a rapidity hardly credible. The recollection one carries away is of a sentimental protagonist, given to tears, to high-flown language, and to slightly theatric action. When he bids his love adieu he speaks thus :

“ Would you, bright excellence, permit me the honor of a chaste embrace, the last happiness this world could give were mine. Exalted goodness! Oh turn your eyes from earth and me to Heaven, where virtue, like yours, is ever heard. Pray for the peace of my departing soul. Early my race with wickedness began and soon I reached the summit.” (Act V, Sc. 2)

Maria gives her fortune to aid the criminal, but like the heroine in the old song she never tells her love, but pines away, forgiving all, even the murderer, and swoons when she is finally taken away from him.

These unhappy lovers again suggest not the sixteenth century but that in which Lillo lived. There is the lachrymose weakness that characterizes Sterne, Richardson, Mackenzie; the glozing of fault and the weakening of tragic intensity that one notices in Rowe and Steele.

This curious conclusion is found also in the language of the play. Lillo takes his stand almost defiantly for prose. Yet he either has too much affection for the rhetorical drama of his time, or realizes that in great moments a prosaic character may rise to poetry; for he falls frequently into a strange rhythmic prose.

Barnwell has just killed his uncle, and bends over his body. This is his rhapsody :

“ Expiring saint! Oh murdered martyred uncle! Lift up your dying eyes and view your nephew in your murderer! Oh do not

look so tenderly upon me! Let indignation light from your eyes and blast me ere you die. By heaven, he weeps, in pity of my woes! The murdered, in the agonies of death, weeps for the murderer," etc. (Act III, Sc. 4)

At still other times, when the homiletic vein is in the ascendant, he speaks in rhymed couplets of a doggerel value, suggesting the ballad from which the play was taken:

"Be warned, ye youths, and see my sad despair;  
Avoid lewd women, false as they are fair.  
By reason guided, honest joys pursue:  
The fair to honour and to virtue true  
Just to herself, will ne'er be false to you.  
By my example learn to shun my fate:  
(How wretched is the man who's wise too late!)  
Ere innocence, and fame, and life, be lost,  
Here purchase wisdom cheaply, at my cost." (Act IV, Sc. 2)

One puts together these bits of dialogue with the suggestions they give as to the character of the speakers. The conclusion one is prone to make after a reading of *Barnwell* is something like this:

Lillo had a domestic tragedy to relate that suggested in its facts the Elizabethan variety. But he lived at a time after England had felt the rule of Puritanism and the rise of many new dissenting sects, after the Bill of Rights had made England a constitutional monarchy and the middle-class man the arbiter of the nation's future; a time when business was expanding and the novel was beginning to express the ordinary man; a time finally when sentimentalism as expressed by Steele and the "She-tragedy" of Rowe had their vogue upon the stage. Lillo reflected strongly all of these things. In *Barnwell*, at least, his domestic tragedy is Elizabethan only in its freedom of form and its general type; the rest belongs quite as much to its time as the work of his less known contemporaries.

"Fatal Curiosity" is a more consistent play, and more powerful in its appeal. The shambling prose-poetry is abandoned for traditional blank verse; a verse in this case which seldom rises to memorable lines, but which is always fluent and dignified. The fable is Elizabethan in point of time. There is the same use of middle-class characters as in *Barnwell*, the same insistence on detail. But the suggestion is not so much of a domestic tragedy as of an attempt to revive the Greek drama of destiny. Old Wilmot and his wife are admirable in their cynical melancholy. Everything in the drama, accidents, portents, the simplest actions of the *dramatis personae* seem to lead to murder, to force it upon the old unfortunates. When their crime has been revealed they waste no time in whining. They are protagonists of the old sort. Wilmot looks almost savagely at those who would comfort him.

"What whining fool art thou who would'st usurp  
My sovereign right to grief?—Was he thy son?" (Act III, Sc. 1)

he says, and stabs himself. One feels that the aged criminals are not to blame; they are playthings in the hands of a malicious fortune.

Young Wilmot and his love are eighteenth-century sentimentalists again, with artificial sentiment and Grandisonian politeness and figures of speech. The impression from *Barnwell* was of an Elizabethan subject treated by a man who had read Defoe and Steele. Here it is of a Greek play, with eighteenth-century sentimentality figuring in the younger people, but leaving unmarred the father and mother and the general action.

"Arden of Feversham" in the later version is an excellent play for analysis. Here a man with independent ideas and interest either in the earlier drama or the simple type of story,

that formed the theme of one variety of that drama, attempts a version for the contemporary stage. How nearly will he keep to the spirit of the original? It is a fair test of Lillo's romanticism.

The earlier "Arden" is a very powerful but very unpleasant play. There is no element of sacrifice, there is no feeling of great pity. The victim is a somewhat covetous merchant who is revealed as a hard landlord; after his death his friend, Franklin, announces to the assembled world that the disaster is the fruit of covetousness; hardly the type for a hero. The rest of the characters, with the possible exception of Michael, are a pretty pack of rascals. Yet the play thrills the reader in an indescribable way because of its uncanny realism. The baldness of the popular ballads is present, also their singularly happy choice of suggestive detail. It is as if the unknown author had admitted his reader to a few scenes from common-place life, presenting exactly the vital scenes, recording just exactly the conversation to stamp the actors forever on the mind. There is no unity of scene; but a certain insistency of purpose, whereby everything leads to the murder, a crisis that is brought to pass in spite of the fates that seem to shield the victim, makes other unity unnecessary. There is that strange combination of utter brutality, broad comedy, and wonderful poetry that one finds in the drama of the earlier time. An excellent model for a man of Lillo's temperament.

The revised version presents many changes. The Reede incident is omitted, likewise the final scene and all of the matter dealing with the painter. Several of the scenes are rearranged and the whole drama condensed into a careful preparation for the climax. All of this is theatrically effective; it is suited to an eighteenth-century audience and does not destroy the inherent value of the original.

There are other changes. Either the reviser's theatrical in-

tuition, or his sympathy or sentiment have noted the absence of pity and loveliness. Consequently one notices many differences in character. Arden becomes more gracious; we hear no more of his cupidity; the scenes with his wife are dwelt on to show his intense affection for her; and at his death it is her confession of complicity that furnishes the last blow. Alice becomes Alicia, no longer the goddess of the machine but a tool in the hands of Mosbie. It is true she has fallen. She has even tried to murder her sleeping husband (an incident originating with Lillo). But remorse harries her. She consents feebly to the plot against Arden. She is present at the death, praying Heaven the while to forgive her, and she confesses and offers herself to justice as an expiation for her sin after attempting the life of Mosbie. In other words, she becomes the sentimental protagonist, like Barnwell, committing crime under duress, and provocative of sympathy rather than scorn. This change is unquestionably an asset to a full theatre, but it unquestionably mars the play, smudging the drawing of the central character and damaging its greatest asset—realism. Michael goes through a like purging, emerging a weak, shadowy boy, lacking both the humor and likeness to life of his namesake in the old version. A possible gain in sympathy is made in this way at an immense loss in strength. No scene illustrates this so well as the great one of the murder. The early play presents the facts sternly in the old ballad manner. Alice does not hesitate to stab her husband:

“What! groans thou? nay, then give me the weapon!  
Take this for hindering Mosbie's love and mine.” (Act V, Sc. 1)

And then she directs Susan to wash away the blood. She is superstitious. The blood will not out, with all her scrubbing, because she “blushed not”. Her courage gives way when Mosbie proposes a toast to her husband on the arrival of

Franklin. But once the body is out of sight she recovers her composure and thinks only of Mosbie;

"I have my wish in that I joy thy sight  
—We'll spend the night in dalliance and sport." (Act V, Sc. 1)

When the Mayor accuses her with the blood, she is ready with an answer.

"It is the pig's blood we had to supper.  
But wherefore stay you? find out the murderers." (Act V, Sc. 1)

—not weakening until she is led away to gaol. Lillo's rearrangement is dramatic. It has many happy touches. But it is not entirely convincing. Alicia has to excuse her participation in the crime. Although a prime-mover in the plot, she repents, invokes Heaven to aid the villain, calls on Arden, nearly reveals the plot to her husband, and attempts to stab the very man for whom it is all done. Mosbie asks her how she fares;

"As the howling damned, and thou my hell . . .  
. . . . . Might but the silent grave  
When it receives me to its dark abode,  
Hide, with my dust, my shame!—O might that be  
And Arden's death revenged! 'Tis my sole prayer;  
If not, may awful justice have her course!" (Act V, Sc. 1)

The scene is not consistent with the original play, or the character with her earlier history.

Much of the excellent blank verse of the original has been retained. But Lillo shows curious ideas in his excisions. Poetry for poetry's sake apparently does not please him. That splendid, though perhaps unnecessary bit of description from Bradshaw:

"A lean-faced writhen knave,  
Hawk-nosed and very hollow-eyed,  
With mighty furrows in his stormy brows . . ." (Act II, Sc. 2)

is omitted altogether. This cut may be defensible from the standpoint of brevity. Not so, however, is the like omission of the dialogue between Greene and Shakebag, which is not only beautiful poetry in itself but really a part of the character development. We have Shakebag left, but he is less interesting and above all less Elizabethan. Other instances could be cited of the ridding of the play of much good poetry, until it exists merely for its narrative of crime: hardly any of those flashes that distinguish the earlier age are left. Even the phrases left are shorn of their artless beauty.

"My golden time was when I had no gold." (Act III, Sc. 5)

issues from Medea's kettle prose:

"Oh happiest was I in my humble state." (Act V, Sc. 2)

Sometimes it is merely the alteration of a word that spoils the charm. Compare:

"Each gentle stirry gale doth shake my bed." (Act III, Sc. 5)  
with

"The gentlest gales of summer shake my bed." (Act V, Sc. 2)

The play is a good one even in its reformed condition. But the reviser has lost many of the very things that gave it its Elizabethan quality. The dialogue has been shortened and toned down; yet it is that very combination of violence and imagination that makes the original impressive. The protagonists likewise have been toned down and sentimentalized to suit a new age—shadows of their old selves. It is an eighteenth-century, polite version of the old tale of lust and blood.

From the evidence of his three chief plays, Lillo would seem to be a man who had no great knowledge of or appreciation for the earlier age. He had an idea, the carrying of

tragedy into the field of common folk. To this he carried his tradesman's love of moralizing and the sentimentality he found about him. He chose old themes apparently because they were in harmony with his principles, not because they were Elizabethan; and in the treatment of them he remains the man of his time, with the facile emotion, the perfervid and stilted dialogue, the general niceness and perhaps a little of the lack of imagination that characterized so many playwrights of the century.

There is no question about Lillo's historic importance. In an inquiry of this kind, however, one is greeted with more evidence of what he might have done than what he actually did. He approached the old drama not with a literary interest, but with that of a practical stage-writer. He returned accidentally to the things Elizabethan because domestic tragedy coincides with his ideas. The day of the conscious literary revival was later.

The sixth decade of the eighteenth century seems a hopeful one in which to look for the springs of real romanticism in English drama; hopeful because by that time, or during that time, so many branches of literary activity were showing signs of awakening interest in the past, of dissatisfaction with the ideas and expression of the present. We need make only a hasty review to see that by 1765, the date of *The Castle of Otranto*, practically all the forces were operative that triumphed in Blake and Burns. While the romantic revolution had produced as yet no single great apostle, it had affected strongly almost every type of literature.

There is a revival of interest in nature to be found in Thompson, Dyer, Shenstone and Akenside. There is a renewed interest in freer poetic forms than those used by Dr. Johnson, that issued from the new cultus of Milton and Spenser. Thomson's *Seasons* suggests a fresh field in the use of the

preternatural and superstitious as literary material. Gray's *Elegy, Written in a Country Churchyard* is an example of the elegiac spirit found also in Blair and Collins. The novel marks a step forward with its interest in man; and with Sterne and Goldsmith a breaking-away from the selfishness and hardness that were undercurrents of eighteenth-century life, for the sympathy of the nineteenth. The word Gothic is no longer a term of quiet contempt as in Addison's time: Catholic architecture is spoken of with enthusiasm, and collectors like Walpole search eagerly for the furniture and armor of the Middle Ages.

All this is symptomatic of a deep interest in the past, an interest that lies at the bottom of romanticism. Scholarship was affected like everything else. Stevens and Malone showed this by their laborious researches. Gray contemplated a history of poetry, a project later fulfilled by Thomas Warton. The old castles became subjects of interest; and buildings were built, supposedly on the old plan, like Strawberry Hill.

Toward the middle of the century these forces, at first hardly apparent, crystallized in a number of remarkable documents. The *Elegy Written in the Country Churchyard* was published in 1751; the *Introduction à l'Histoire de Danemarck*, 1755; Percy's *Five Runic Pieces*, 1763; Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, 1762; Gray's *Descent of Odin* and *The Fatal Sisters*, 1765; *The Castle of Otranto*, 1765; Percy's *Reliques*, 1765; the first instalment of *Ossian*, 1760; Chatterton's fragments, 1767-1770. Those years were crowded with achievement worth noting from an intrinsic point of view, and from the historical, decidedly significant.

It would seem natural at this time, then, to look for some similar movement in the dramatic field. At first sight the outlook is promising. The Shakespearean revivals of Garrick were markedly successful, and though Shakespeare outdis-

tanced all the other Elizabethans, there are performances from time to time of Jonson, Marlowe, Shirley. The public was interested in the production at least of certain of the older plays. And in 1757, the date of *Douglas*, this revival of the old spirit has apparently caught the new drama. Here was a play lauded by Gray, one of the distinct high priests of the new movement, as having "retrieved the true language of the stage, dead these hundred years"; as being, despite its faults, a very powerful play. *Douglas* found its origin in an old ballad. It held the stage for fifty years at least. It was looked upon as the harbinger of great things on the stage. How far was this trust justified? How far did romance enter into the drama after its production? What kind of romance?

To answer these questions let us examine the dramatic output from the date of Home's masterpiece, to 1785, the date of the production of *The Sorrows of Werther*, which introduced romanticism of an entirely different kind.

The result of an inquiry of this sort is somewhat disappointing. There is not much new tragedy; the number of new tragedies seems to diminish as the time goes on; and the romantic influence is not comparable to that found in poetry. Even men like Thompson and Mason, freed to a certain extent from the poetic bonds of their time, when they essayed the drama fell short of success. They did not seem to understand the form. The reason was probably that their interest was principally lyrical rather than dramatic; so they took to Spenser and Milton first, and Shakespeare only secondarily; and they enjoyed Shakespeare for the poetry rather than the drama—*A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*.

At any rate the age produced few tragedians worthy of rank, and few memorable tragedies. The serious drama between our arbitrary dates, 1757-1785, may be divided in a general way into three classes: (1) Those that follow classic

models; (2) an indefinite group adhering generally to the English tradition modified by the practice of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; (3) those that show any romantic tendency. Of course this is merely a working division. The lines of demarcation between the classes are shadowy. There is something of a family likeness in all. Still we do feel these lines of cleavage, and they are useful in an analysis of the drama.

## THE CLASSIC TYPE

The word classic is an unfortunately indefinite one, having very different meanings for different people. In architecture it may mean the classic of the Pantheon, of the Parthenon, of the Chateau of Versailles, or the Church of St. Pancras in London; in art may mean equally well the spirit of Watteau or of Ingres. So in literature of the eighteenth century it may suggest work following Voltaire just as well as that modelled on Euripides. No great definition of the term is necessary here, for the simple reason that in the drama practically all of the variations of the word are to be found. The only generalization that can be made is that the civilization of the century of Gray and Johnson was Roman classic rather than Greek; that the Roman idea came largely through the by-way of France; and that because of this all the work has a tinge of the French about it, or was written under the rules laid down in France. In the classic dramas subsequent to *Douglas*, some aim nobly to imitate the Greek, some seem simply to follow the classic tradition of Rome as it was handed down through France, and some frankly imitate the modern classic of Voltaire. As in the larger grouping one class shades off into another, but we can here, as there, find fairly well-marked examples of all.

### (a) *The Greek Spirit*

There is a rather surprising interest in Attic models during the eighteenth century, shown in various ways. Genest numbers adaptations of Euripides and Sophocles, some of which were presented at the regular theatres. These two masters suggested the fables for many playwrights; and that they

were widely read is proved by the claim of many dramatists that they had taken hints from Greek tragedy when the result did not seem to bear it out. Murphy in his *Alzuma* (1773) claimed to have taken hints from Sophocles and Euripides; Thompson's *Edward and Eleanor* (written 1739) was modelled on Euripides; Delap's *Royal Suppliants* on Eschylus; Home's *Alfred* took hints from Sophocles. There were editions of the three great poets in English, showing a literary demand as well as a dramatic. How far the borrowing was direct, of course, and how far it came through France is another matter.

Of the new plays written on Greek models the most famous, and the most successful, were *Elfrida* and *Caractacus*, by William Mason. Mason was a clergyman and dilettante, sometime chaplain to the King, a poet, a musician and a painter. As such his life was "sequestered", to use a favorite word of the dramatists of the time. He lived in a backwater, away from the struggle for existence that is meat to the dramatist. Drama to him was rather a matter of literature than of life. He regarded it as might be expected of a cultured clergyman—through the large end of the opera-glass; he saw the clash of motives of mankind afar off, through the medium of his reading. It was natural that with his predilections he should admire the ancient drama; equally natural that with his lack of practical stage experience he should fail to see its inadaptability to the English stage. There is no doubt as to his purpose, however: to get back to the purely classic tradition and write a play purified of the modern degradations.

He seems not to have been sure at the outset of the practicability of his plan. He calls *Elfrida* a "dramatic poem" and attaches to it a justification in the form of several letters. Here he shows his creed: Good sense as well as antiquity prescribe the unities. Though tragedy is chiefly directed to the

heart, it cannot obtain its end without the approbation of the judgment; and to secure this approbation the artificial construction of the fable goes a great way: witness the success of the French. Still it is inadvisable to ride one's hobby too hard, and may be difficult to create a Greek drama that will be correct in letter as well as spirit. Milton perhaps went too far in his imitation, making in *Samson Agonistes* a drama more simple and severe than Athens herself would have demanded. The drama should adapt itself to the general taste. So, instead of taking the great Greek themes of patriotism and the distresses of royalty, which are a little forbidding in character, the dramatist will choose the affections raised rather from the instincts of common humanity, and characters as nearly like those of one's own country as tragic dignity will permit. He will choose for his subject an English theme; and he will embellish his play with a romantic setting in an English forest.

But above all, he holds a brief for the chorus. This, he insists, supplies the lyrical interest, binds the acts together, and adds pomp and majesty to the scene of the drama. Too much "business", incident, bustle, have taken the place of simplicity and pathos in the modern stage, a happy change for the generality of writers perhaps, but a distinct loss in the "embellishment of picturesque description, sublime allegory and whatever comes under the denomination of pure poetry". Mason pays an involuntary tribute to Shakespeare who has done all this naturally, and, "what is most strange", joined it with pure passion. He regrets that the time in which Shakespeare lived, and his training, kept him from a knowledge of Greek models. There is still the eighteenth-century condescension toward the Elizabethans.

With these things, then, he starts his play of *Elfrida* — an English theme in a picturesque background — to please the public—but with strict adherence to the unities, and the pres-

ence of the chorus. That he was not entirely wrong in his calculations, that there was something appealing in the play, is proved by the twenty-seven performances Elfrida enjoyed when first produced, and by its later revival.

The fable concerns the struggle between pure love and guilty love for a woman. Elfrida is hidden by her husband Athelwold to save her from his licentious King and master. But the King discovers her retreat and her husband's deception of him, with results that cause the death of Athelwold and the retirement of his wife to a nunnery.

The first thing noticeable in the play is what we would expect, a difficulty in weaving together the lyric part of the play, the chorus, with the dramatic part, the actors. The drama opens with a soliloquy. The father of the heroine is looking for his daughter; and the exposition unfolds rather awkwardly through a long speech. As he wanders he hears a chorus and catches the refrain.

"Hail to thy living light, ambrosial morn,  
All hail thy roseate ray"—

they sing. He listens and tries to account for their presence there:

"The females, I suppose,  
Whom Athelwold has left my child's attendants."

Hardly a very poetic description; but when he addresses them he adorns his speech with unusual garniture:

"Never yet  
Have I passed by the night bird's favorite spray,  
What time she pours her wild and artless song,  
Without attentive pause and silent rapture;  
How could I then with savage disregard  
Hear voices tuned by nature sweet as hers,  
Graced with all art's addition."

In other words, there is a certain strain in order to unify the

scene, and to make the man talk in the same key with the "virgins", which immediately stiffens the reading of his characters. Sometimes the pull is the other way. The dramatic action is atop; the virgins commence to speak, and their recitative loses its heroic character.

"But hark, that certainty arrives. Methought  
I heard a winding horn. I did not err."

Possibly because of this dual type of actor the characters are not well realized. There is nothing heroic about the heroine. She has none of the superb old Greek spirit, nor is she a daughter of the Saxons. She has caught the eighteenth-century ideal of weakness, sentimentality and extreme modesty. Her conversation is stilted and unnatural. She sees her father and turns to her companions:

"Yes it is him; it is my father, virgins,  
Support me or I faint! Oh wherefore, Sir?"

And then acquiescing rather humbly to her father's vengeance on her husband:

" . . . . . Yes, he must fall.  
Yet pardon me if my poor trembling heart  
Puts up I know not what of prayers and vows  
To every pitying heart. Celestial guardians  
Of nuptial constancy! Oh bend from Heaven," etc.

Her heart and eyes suffer much through the tragedy, yet at the end when her husband has been torn from her and killed, her only thought is a nunnery with constant weeping over the sainted clay. All of which is an unusual reading of a Saxon woman's character.

The other characters are likewise mannered, all save Athelwold who seems fairly lifelike, like one of those figures in a dream that has more tangibility than the others. Instead of



In varied beauty bright;  
That bids each dewy-spangled flowret rise  
And dart around its vermeil dies;  
Bids silver lustre grace yon sparkling tide,  
That winding warbles down the mountain side."

Milton, of course, comes to mind, the Milton of the Nativity Hymn. The two poems do not compare in merit, but there is in the imitation a joy in the beauty of the world about him which he sings in a form unusual to the majority in his time.

Sometimes the suggestion is at first of the eighteenth century:

"The turtle tells her plaintive tale  
Sequestered in some shady vale."

But soon it takes on the earlier tone:

"There goddess on the shaggy mound  
Where tumbling torrents roar around,  
Where pendant mountains o'er your head  
Stretch their reverential shade . . ."

And in the refrain redolent in form at least of his early master:

"And o'er his saintly temples bland distil  
Seraphic day dreams of heaven's happiness,"

Sometimes *Comus* is hinted at, sometimes the word arrangement of *Paradise Lost*. Through it all it is the rich pictorial in Milton that the later poet tries to imitate: "nectareous dews", "sports and smiles a jocund train". Not great poetry this, sometimes little more than travesty. But it is significant in the drama where so little but epigram and aphorism are to be found at this time. A poet is attempting to put new lyric suggestions into the drama and is at least partially succeeding.

Nature, too, is a novelty; not the wild nature of Thompson's *Hebrides*. Everything is well groomed even to the language, which is mannered to a degree:

"How nobly does this venerable oak  
 Gilt with the glories of the orient sun  
 Embosom your fair mansion! The soft air  
 Salutes me with most cool and temperate breath,  
 And as I tread the flower besprinkled lawn,  
 Sends up a gale of fragrance."

" . . . . . an old oak spreads his awful arm  
 Mantled in brownest foliage, and beneath  
 The ivy, gadding from the untwisted stem  
 Curtains each verdant side."

—put in purely as he says for embellishment. Yet Mason has a sense of the pictorial, and it is the fine dignity of the play as a whole, with its highly-colored artificial background of nature and the music of the reminiscent odes that makes it not difficult to read today and probably accounts for its early stage success.

*Caractacus* is a much better play. It was written later, after some experience with the acting stage and more knowledge of the technique of playwriting. We notice a gain in the ease of the opening. Exposition is this time by dialogue, dialogue that is fairly direct. As in *Elfrida*, the conversation has the eighteenth-century sententiousness, but it is less pompous and formal than in the earlier play.

*Eli*: What means my brother?

*Vel*: Dost thou refuse the charge?

*Eli*: Dost thou accept it?

*Vel*: It gives us liberty.

*Eli*: It makes us traitors.

Gods, would Vellimus do a deed of baseness?

or again:

"I would be anything save what I am."

There is a distinct gain in the ease of the verse and its adaptability for conversation.

The characters of *Caractacus* himself and of Vellimus are

fine and dignified. The old King is impetuous and rash; he damns his son without hearing him, then embraces him with transport when he finds himself in error. Something he is of a swashbuckler, something too of a stoic, as is shown in the last phase of the play—and the best. The Romans suggest his fate and what it might have been, and the best in him comes to the fore.

*Car:* Soldier, I had arms,  
Had neighing steeds to whirl my iron cars,  
Had wealth, dominion. Dost thou wonder, Roman,  
I fought to save them? What if Caesar aims,  
To lord it universal o'er the world,  
Shall the world tamely crouch at Caesar's foot-stool?

*Aulus:* Read in thy fate our answer. Yet if sooner  
Thy pride had yielded—

*Car:* Thank thy gods, I did not.  
Had it been so, the glory of thy master,  
Like my misfortunes, had been short and trivial,  
Oblivion's ready prey: Now, after struggling  
Nine years, and that right bravely, 'gainst a tyrant,  
I am his slave to treat as seems him good;  
If cruelly, 'twill be an easy task  
To bow a wretch, alas! how bow'd already!  
Down to the dust: If well, his clemency,  
When trick'd and varnish'd by your glossing penmen,  
Will shine in honour's annals, and adorn  
Himself; it boots not me. Look there, look there,  
The slave that shot that dart, kill'd ev'ry hope  
Of lost Caractacus! Arise, my daughter.  
Alas! poor prince; art thou too in vile fetters!

(to *Elidurus*.)

Come hither, youth: Be thou to me a son,  
To her a brother. Thus with trembling arms  
I lead you forth; children, we go to Rome.  
Weep'st thou, my girl? I prithee hoard thy tears  
For the sad meeting of thy captive mother:  
For we have much to tell her, much to say  
Of these good men, who nurtur'd us in Mona;  
Much of the fraud and malice, that pursu'd us;  
Much of her son, who pour'd his precious blood

To save his sire and sister: Think'st thou, maid,  
 Her gentleness can hear the tale, and live?  
 And yet she must. O gods, I grow a talker! . . .

This may not be true to ancient British character, but it rings true to our ideas of what it might have been, which after all is just as good.

As a drama, *Caractacus* is open to the same faults as its predecessor, but not to the same degree, since the magnificence of the pageantry, the picturesqueness of the background and increased spiritual action atone for the absence of the real events, which take place off stage as before. The chorus, too, seems better fitted into the order of things: it is natural in a Druidical grove, natural in a time of great national crisis; it has its justification as an engineer of fate, to suggest impending catastrophe. The scene in the moonlit grove as the Druids descend and chant their incantation is a splendid one, dream-like perhaps and unreal—which is just as well. The word pictures are all good; which brings us to the matter of diction and poetry.

Nature is pictorial as before, but everything is better done:

Behold yon oak,  
 How stern he frowns, and with his broad brown arms  
 Chills the pale plain beneath him.

It is more than a background; it enters into the composition of the play and affects the characters. *Caractacus* in his trouble laments the peace of the scene about him:

This holy place, methinks, doth this night wear  
 More than its wonted gloom: Druid, these groves  
 Have caught the dismal coloring of my soul,  
 Changing their dark dun garbs to very sable,  
 In pity of their guest. Hail, hallowed oaks!  
 Hail British born! who last of British race,  
 Hold your primeval rights by nature's charter;  
 Not at a nod of Caesar. Happy foresters,

Ye wave your bold heads in the liberal air ;  
Nor ask, for privilege, a praetor's edict.  
Ye with your rough and intertwined roots,  
Grasp the grim rocks ye sprung from ; and, erect  
In knotty hardihood, still proudly spread  
Your leafy banners 'gainst the tyrannous north,  
Who Roman-like assails you. Tell me, druid,  
Is it not better to be such as these,  
Than be the thing I am.

The chorus is suggestive of Milton in a more restrained way :

Sleep and silence reign around ;  
Not a night-breeze wakes to blow ;  
Circle, sons, this holy ground ;  
Circle close, in triple row.

This is an echo of *Comus*, with a little of the feeling, too, of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

There is a greater echo of Shakespeare in one of the later songs :

Fear not now the fever's fire  
Fear not now the death-bed groan,  
Pangs that torture, pangs that tire,  
Bed-rid age with feeble moan.

Of course we think of *Cymbeline*. But the later poet insists on a refrain in the manner of Spenser, spoiling much of the song quality of the lyric ; and the next stanza has a different tone and tempo. These odes are not, in fact, the real lyrics of a play, but odes, formal, general undramatic "pieces" to be set to music and put into the drama. It is as if a man who had read much but created little were trying his hand in the manner of one after another of his favorite poets.

*Caractacus* is a splendid play. Mason has essayed what Dryden suggested, a play with an English theme but with the conditions of the Greek theatre. While not entirely successful, he has produced a tragedy with some of the greatness of

*Samson Agonistes*; it lacks the power of Milton's masterpiece, but gains something in sympathy and picturesqueness. It is curious, too, that this drama, the farthest remove from anything like romantic intent, should have more of the new feeling than many of the plays definitely labelled as of the progressive school: a distinct gain in the appreciation of nature and the picturesque, and a struggle to achieve again some of the lyric quality of the earlier masters with their diction and music. It was a failure so far as lasting greatness was concerned, but a fine failure.

A slight variation of the classic bias is found in the work of Dr. Delap, the friend of Mason, at one time his curate. His qualifications were those of his associate: he was a scholar of the drama, and a spectator rather than an actor in life. Three plays issued from his pen, in one of which he essays the new Celtic background — this will be treated in its place. The earlier ones remain true to the love of classic lore that distinguished so many scholars of the time. *Hecuba* will serve as a fair example.

This play discards the chorus, though supernumerary virgins are introduced as confidants—the author needs assistance of some agents of the kind. Otherwise he keeps even more rigorously to the Greek ideal than Mason. Mason had the wisdom to doubt the success of the old themes on a modern stage, and with his British suggestions achieved a species of success. Delap either lacked the intuition of his master or refused to sacrifice his ideals.

*Hecuba* is founded in a general way on the *Hecuba* of Euripides, though the reviser has added a complication in the presence of a supposedly murdered son of the Queen, an element making for surprise of recognition and a certain dramatic effect; an element very popular, too, with the dramatists of the time.

No definite crisis is put before the spectator. Pyrrhus demands the sacrifice of Polyxena to gratify his vengeance. The demand comes at a time when the ambassador from Troy, Hecuba's son Eriphilus, though unknown to her, sues for her release. When the girl is led away to the altar, Eriphilus, in a rage, discovers his identity and finally stabs himself to avoid murder at the hands of his enemies who wish to extinguish Priam's line. Hecuba is left half mad, childless and alone. All of the characters were known to the Greeks and the presentations could not but have been moving to them. To interest an English audience the author would need a certain skill in the unfoldment of character through fine declamation. This, unfortunately, Delap lacks.

The declamation is heavy without being weighty. At times it essays the sententiousness of Addison:

"That little tent,  
Spread in the darksome gloom of yon lone beech,  
Contains all Troy."

There is little inspiration in any of it. In the recitative the best we can say is that it is free from false ornament. Otherwise the impression is of absolute frigidity. Here is the best example of narrative:

*Eumelus:*

Pyrrhus unsheath'd the sword—Quick at the fight,  
The youth approach'd.—She saw, and thus she spake.  
Heroes of Greece! You who in ashes laid  
My conquer'd country! Let no hand profane  
Touch me. My heart unshrinking meets the blow!  
Not like a slave.—Heroes of Greece forbid!  
But like great Priam's daughter, oh permit me,  
Free as my birth t'approach the gods below;  
Not like a slave.—Heroes of Greece forbid!  
A fav'ring murmur followed; and the youth  
Drew back at Pyrrhus' nod.—Down from her shoulders  
With rosy flame, she stript her virgin veil,

And bar'd her beauteous breast, that far surpast  
 Ev'n Dian's statue. Then upon one knee  
 These mournful words she spake; Lo, prince, my bosom,  
 Deep in my heart the friendly faulchion fix—  
 One wretched boon I beg—My breathless corse  
 Unbought restore to my dear mother's arms.  
 Oh let her tears the precious purchase pay!  
 She said—Tears gush'd from every Grecian eye.  
 Ev'n Pyrrhus paus'd.—Irresolute, aghast,  
 He roll'd his eyes, and wildly struck the blow.  
 She fell; and falling, carefully compos'd  
 Her decent limbs—

But the feature in which the tragedy falls farthest from grace is in its revelation of character. We have a right to expect greatness, heroism, from the Greeks and Trojans. We get nothing of the kind from this reading of them. Ulysses is wise, but hardly admirable. Hecuba is not the Hecuba we used to know. She has apparently read Collins and Mason. She likes gentle melancholy:

I'll go with thee, my child, to good Pyrechines.  
 There in the social sweets of friendly converse,  
 Lose each sad moment, save when thou and I  
 Sometime retire beneath the pensive gloom  
 Of some sequestered poplar; there we'll sit  
 And talk together o'er the buried virtues  
 Of some loved friend.

Or she will sit

And ponder on my Polydore and death,

When they ravish her daughter from her she speaks in this wise:

Cast not on me  
 Such fearful looks. Ye shall not see a tear.  
 I will not struggle with th'opposeless might  
 Of stern necessity. Now to my breast  
 Comes resolution unappall'd by nature.

No more a mother now, but queen of Troy.  
Or if great Hector's mother.—Hector's gone!  
His spirit was too noble to stay here.  
And my Polyxena, my dear last child,  
—My last!—my last, Sigea!—my last child!  
Oh in thy bosom let me hide my tears!  
Yes they are tears!

Spoken as a queen should speak, perhaps, yet it fails to move. As in the other lines Hecuba was the wailing heroine, here she is the heroine who plays to the crowd. "Yes they are tears." Like others she asks rhetorical questions in her grief, and recites a piece. The short exclamation she gives when her son dies is worth dozens of such lines:

'Tis done! 'Tis done.

The children of Priam appear even less like themselves than their mother. Eriphelus resembles an old Greek much as Guido's dancing St. Michael resembles the mediæval conception. He minces through the play. His heart flutters much. Joy at time quite unmans him. He is Mr. Sentiment himself. ✓ Likewise, Polyxena. She welcomes those who kindly come to mix with her grief their social tears. She loves tears. She also is decorous to a degree. Even after the sacrifice she remembers as she dies, decently to compose her limbs. Dresden-china Trojans, all.

Delap evidently knew his ancients, also Voltaire, Thompson, Collins, Mason. He tried a certain type play probably because it bespoke tradition; but as he had no stagecraft or genius the result is what we might expect, bald, wooden. Dr. Johnson remarked that Delap knew neither art nor life, which was unkind; but the best one can say is that Hecuba is a sincere attempt to treat an old theme in an old way. The effort was greater than the achievement.

It is surprising to find John Home, the author of *Douglas*, in the classic group. Yet his entire life and training, his intellectual background, were such as to make him a conservative rather than a radical in the dramatic field. One wonders if *Douglas* were really an accident after all, if the man simply stumbled on something different. The rest of his literary output is either definitely classic or merely the echo of his great success.

Home's training was similar to that of Mason and Delap—he was a clergyman with a taste for dramatics. He lived far away from the literary centers where the cult of Voltaire and of Addison reached its height, but he was not a product of the country, like Allan Ramsay. When he read, he read the literature of the time. When he wrote, his writing was of things remembered rather than things seen. He paid a poetic tribute to Shakespeare; but in it he disclaimed any attempt to imitate the great master—whether because he disagreed with his artistic tenets or felt his own insufficiency he does not say. When he actually began to write, at any rate, he turned at once to the themes of Greece and Rome and the classic manner of presentation.

Two of his plays, *Agis* and *The Siege of Aquileia*, are as orthodox in theme and treatment as the most conservative purist of the time could desire.

*Agis* ran for only eleven nights, on the strength of Garrick's acting. The reader cannot help feeling that it needed all the resources the greatest actor of his time could bring, for it offers little to a latter-day examination. The legend concerned the later history of Greece and the struggle between Agis and his court. A strict presentation would have limited the action to the affairs of state, as in Delap's *Hecuba*; but Home, apparently worried about going too far with his classicism, introduced love interest to please English readers. Un-

fortunately the love interest does not please them. One feels quite the same disgust for Lysander that he has for himself when he comes back to Sparta, practically abandoning his king, to interview so feeble a lady as Euanthe. Agis himself is a figure-head, talked about with gusto, but seldom appearing on the stage, and appearing only as a vehicle of sundry platitudes. There are no striking lines in the drama, not even the scrap of epigram to be found now and then in Delap. Nor is there aught of the picturesqueness or rhetoric of Mason. Here and there the lines reflect Home's reading. Now it is from the Bible:

"Thy gods shall be my gods; thy people mine."

Now the eighteenth-century classicists:

Bid vengeance and Lysander come tomorrow.

Sometimes it is absolutely awkward:

My valiant brother bears a generous mind,  
And though of arms enamored, justice loves.

Always heavy and prosaic. The best lines in the play are almost directly from Plutarch. Taking it all together the author lacks both the dramatic and the poetic power necessary to carry out the plot. There is not a vestige of romance. It is hard reading.

The *Siege of Aquileia* is, as might be hoped, much better. There is a clarity in the fable missing in the earlier play. The theme is big—the choice for a father between the safety of his sons and what he believes to be the honor of Rome. The unities are just as rigidly observed as before. The play is almost static. But there is a certain bigness in the background, an ease in the verse and a dignity in the conception of Roman manners that carry the story along successfully. Reminiscences are to be found of *Douglas*, of *Agis*, of *The*

*Orphan of China*, possibly of Shakespeare in the use of dreams and portents; but the borrowings are well used, the man has learned something of theatrical technique.

There is a similarity in all these classic or pseudo-classic plays. The authors were scholars. They read much. And, as was natural in the age, their tastes ran to classic things: to Greek things. It is not to be wondered at that they should feel little of the new movement for freedom that was becoming so evident in other fields, and at the end of an examination there is still the wonder that the man most loyal to the spirit of Greece was the only one to show the slightest hint of romanticism.

It is odd that there is so much variety among these classic dramas. They lack the family feeling noticeable among the usual run of plays of the time.

As soon as we approach the more practical playwrights we find a difference in idea and execution. The plays are still retrospective in subject—classic, in a word; but the classicism is not of Greece or Rome: it is founded on Voltaire. The influence of the great Frenchman on English letters was far-reaching. Voltaire lived in England from 1726 to 1729. He incarnated in his dramas the ideals so popular with Addison and others. He knew his Shakespeare and admired Shakespeare's plays—he was too great a critic, in spite of the limitations of his age, not to see the poetry in them, though he deplored his "barbarities". Yet he borrowed freely from the older master, took without thanks for his own plays many of the things he had ridiculed. In England he suffered something of the same fate. His plays were translated, acted with success by men who criticized his strictures on Shakespeare. Succeed he certainly did, and his vogue lasted until the last quarter of the century.

Many of the English dramatists feigning a greater degree of scholarship than they possessed, traced their plots back to the Greeks when, as a matter of fact, they are to be found in Voltaire; and the crises of not a few other plays owe their inspiration to the same source.

This species of classic play is worthy of study because it presents what might be called practical classicism, the French adaptation of classical themes that proved so appealing to a certain type of mind during the eighteenth century. The type differs only slightly from what we may call the traditional English class, differs mostly in the matter of certain dramatic usages, and makes a convenient transition to the second larger division of plays.

The *Orphan of China* by Murphy is a good example. Murphy was a practical playwright who had tried his hand at more than one type of play, this being the most nearly correct according to the philosophy of the time. It is an adaptation of Voltaire's play of the same name for the English stage. The scene is remote from ordinary life, concerns in general the fate of the Chinese dynasty, more particularly the love of a mother for her son as in *The Siege of Aquileia*; and is presented with much ornament and rhetorical declamation.

Suggestions are not wanting of a stock eighteenth-century type of the characters and the plot: the idea of a son brought up in ignorance of his parentage, who discovers his mother through his emotion on seeing her; and events of state that interfere with their happiness; also the usurping despot; the faithful servitor who bides the time until the true monarch can be placed on the throne—all these are present in the *Orphan of China* as in many a play written in the freer English form.

The play is dignified but hardly interesting. It is no easy matter, as Genest remarks of another play of this kind, to be interested in events so remote from average life.

A counsellor brings up as his own son the only survivor of a supposedly extinct royal line, and sends his own son away. With the passing of time the two youths take part in a conspiracy to right the throne. The commoner is captured, the prince discovers his royal birth, and when the tyrant seeks to find out the identity of the two conspirators, the mother and father hesitate in their duty between their country and their blood.

The despot in a way suggests Tamburlaine because of his nationality, his splendor, and his cruelty. But he has none of the purple poetry of his predecessor. When he enters the drama he talks prose:

"Hail to this regal dome, this gorgeous palace!  
Where this inventive race have lavished all  
Their elegance: ye gay apartments hail!  
Beneath your storied roof, where mimic life  
Glow to the eye, and at the painter's touch  
A new creation lives along the walls;  
Once more receive a conqueror, arrived  
From rougher scenes, where stern rebellion dared  
Draw forth his phalanx; till this warlike arm  
Hurled desolation on his falling ranks,  
And now the monster, in yon field of death,  
Lies overwhelmed in ruin."

This tame Tamburlaine also desires to aid the conquered by "yielding to their soft manners, their vesture, laws and customs; thus to blend and make the whole an undistinguished people". He is sentimental at heart. He weeps and shows conscience over his misdeeds—small misdeeds compared with those of the great conqueror of Marlowe. Not one of these eighteenth-century tyrants is consistently evil to the end—perhaps that would be in bad taste.

*Zenobia* marks a departure toward a little more freedom of treatment and suggests Fletcher and the Heroic Tragedy as

well as Voltaire. Still there is the rigorous attention to the unities; but the plot is decked out with military processions, and there is some of the panoply of the older English drama. The *dramatis personae* own to familiar-sounding names—Pharasmanes, Tigranes, Rhadamistus. Love is the great motive: while essentially the story deals with a rightful prince struggling for his throne, the real interest is the love of two brothers for the same lady. Both of the heroes are passionate in love and mad in their expression of it. This is how one of them puts it:

“ . . . love like mine  
Fierce, generous, wild—with disappointment wild,  
May rouse my desperate rage to do a deed  
Will make all nature shudder.”

They are magnanimous in quarrel:

“ I will protect her, will restore her to thee  
Or do a deed shall strike mankind with horror.  
Not even a father shall retard my sword,  
In his own blood I'll drink it.”

The heroine displays extravagant beauty and constancy, loves devotedly and to the end:

“ . . . I rushed upon him  
And with these arms, close wreathing round his neck,  
With all the vehemence of prayers and shrieks,  
Implored the only boon he then could grant,  
To perish with him in a fond embrace.”

All of these quotations are suggestive in their florid English. The wording loses the restraint taught by the careful art of Voltaire and bursts into the extravagances of Young and Lee, without their poetry. The author evidently essays a tragedy in the manner of Voltaire, but though he observes the more obvious proprieties, his practical training, his knowledge of what the stage he is writing for has been used to, causes

him to develop his characters in the looser manner of the English and achieve more color and warmth though less dignity.

*Zenobia* is near the line that divides the even outwardly classical plays from the usual run of the time. *Cyrus*, by Hoole, is still nearer.

The idea of this drama is taken partly from Metastasio, mostly from Voltaire. But the structure is at once made more flexible in the English redaction. The author even allows one of the unities to go—naturally that of place: he admits a few changes of scene. He also admits, like Murphy in the *Orphan of China*, a love element to complicate the plot. Furthermore the conversation, though florid, is fairly easy, and ease is not a usual quality in the regular classic plays, or even in the *Orphan of China*.

It is artificial in structural character. The action progresses as much by asides, exclamations and soliloquies as by legitimate action. The exits and entrances are awkward. Character interest centers in the recognition by a mother of her long-lost son; and the really good scene in the drama is that in which because of a misunderstanding she repulses him, and then finds him condemned to death because of her hastiness. With one exception the acts are slight. Yet the play is eminently actable and reads at least easily, which accounts for its great popularity in its time. A happy issue out of their troubles for the protagonists is also noticeable, and also symptomatic of the wishes of playgoers contemporary with Hoole. The drama of *Cyrus* is a long remove from *Caractacus*. Yet they are in the same group. At bottom they have the same ideals, are removed from each other mostly in matters of diction and external form, because some of their authors had more practical knowledge of the stage than others.

Here, then, is the type of work of those who followed the

classic tradition in one variation or another. Those who were more scholarly came nearest the ancient ideal in a literary way; those who were more practical found themselves inevitably pulled to the usual method of doing things. And in spite of rules and homilies approaching the easy free method of the English, that involves "business" or dramatic action. Not one of them presents a vestige of real romanticism. The nearest to it is paradoxically the farthest from it—Mason in *Caractacus*, with the faint adumbration of nature and the lyric. ✓

## THE GENERAL TYPE

A European parliament is divided roughly into three parts, like Gaul. These parts are termed the right, the center, and the left. The extreme groups afford the most significant material for study since they represent the ultra-conservative and the distinctly radical thought of the country. The center is valuable to an onlooker simply as an indication of moderate opinion—the point of view of the average citizen. So it is with Tragedy in the eighteenth century. What originality there was expressed itself for the most part either in distinctly classical performances or in feeble attempts at Romanticism. The middle-of-the-road group simply pictures the type of theme, of setting, of underlying philosophy. What kind of work did the usual eighteenth-century tragedian do, who had no particular “views” to speak of, whose effort was simply to write a good play and to appeal to the public?

In the era of Dr. Johnson this matter is not a difficult one to resolve, since tragedy had approached a type. In this group we are considering the plays that do not obviously follow classic or French models, or show sufficient originality to suggest romance of one kind or another; but simply the English tragedy handed down from the age of mystery plays, transformed in the days of Elizabeth and later passing through a deep-sea change at the time of the restoration. Through all these variations certain essentials retained their integrity, modified it is true by French influence, but only secondarily. The group is disappointing, for the type represents the natural decay and death of the old tragedy that was both actable and literary. English tradition had solidified, petrified, until its

offerings lost all originality; and a latter-day reader can go through the productions at Drury Lane, Covent Garden and Hay only to find the same threadbare themes, plots, and language in almost every year-report with few and feeble variations.

The names in this general group are suggestive: *Albina*, *Zoraida*, *Sethona*, *Cleonice*, *The Grecian Daughter*, *Matilda*, *The Countess of Warwick*, *The Countess of Salisbury*, *The Fair Apostate*. A majority of them are named for, and concern, heroines rather than heroes; the fashion set by Otway and Rowe is still current. The names also give an idea of the correct background for Tragedy: classic lands, old English history and particularly the East. Most of the heroines—this likewise in a general way is prefigured in the titles—are queens, princesses, or at least countesses; and the play concerns itself with the unsmooth path run by their love. The ideas of Lillo and Moore have apparently been discarded. Tragedy concerns the great folk of the world, possibly because their very remoteness lends them a certain picturesque, romantic quality, partly because propriety would suggest it—here we have the fashion of the Heroic Tragedy.

Love is the universal motive of these dramas. We have done with the time when broad divisions might have been made in Tragedies according to their mainsprings—patriotism, revenge, and other passions. The one type is that which has to do with the tempestuous loves of great men and women.

Nor is there much variation in the themes built about this motive. Revenge is found often, but not the revenge of the Elizabethan drama: here it always has to do with the machinations of a rejected suitor to rid himself of his enemy and take his place in the affections of the heroine. For the most part there is merely the case of rivalry for the possession of a woman. Even in the so-called historical plays the clash of

nation upon nation, the thrill of pride in the glory of country is subordinated to the monarch's or the duke's love. Indeed when a poet chooses his theme from among the Chronicles he makes history over to suit himself, and as Home says in his preface to *Alfred*, he takes as truly noble subjects not so much what actually happened, but what might possibly have happened, granting such characters and such a concatenation of circumstances. The great old Saxon monarch is transformed into a fatuous lover and glee-man; and Warwick, the man who made and unmade kings, into a very sentimental monster who upsets England not to satisfy ambition or pure lust of power, but merely from pique because the king wishes to wed the woman he has selected as his own partner in life. None of these things actually took place, but the argument is that Alfred being young might have forgot his sturdy manhood and sunk to the level of the whining lover, and Warwick likewise, to furnish the proper interest for the play. Love very literally rules the court, the camp, the grove, and at least all men below—Coleridge's dictum.

In the way of plot we find much stiffness and in general a deep regard for the Unities. A slight concession is made regarding background, and in most plays the scene changes from act to act. The scenes within the act, however, take place almost invariably at the same spot, and variety in background is small. There is none of that continual shifting that Sir Philip Sidney notices in his time, in which a spectator may pass in the course of an afternoon from England to France, to Africa, and back again to England. St. Paul's timid adjuration is observed, concerning the doing of things decently and in order.

Unity of time is observed almost as a fetich. The events of a play spin out their course within a day's or at most a two days' limit. Much happens in that time. In *Warwick* a king

quarrels with his chief subject over the matter of a state marriage, an exiled queen schemes discord in the kingdom to seat her own son on the throne; and before the day is ended the king-maker has been in gaol, has been released, has been the subject of a battle and alternately reviled and wept over by his creature the king. In *Sethona* the hero and heroine fall three different times into the hands of the cruel usurper and the fate of Egypt changes as many times. In other words, probabilities are stretched to the breaking point in order to secure variety and movement; yet any transition that would involve the passages of months or years is apparently unbelievable.

Naturally, too, the action is single. Six to ten characters compose the average *dramatis personae*, which usually number a heroine and her confidant, a hero with something of the kind, a villain, or more strictly speaking an enemy usurper, and a minor character or two. There are no dual plots or sub-plots. There is a rigid exclusion of anything like comic interest, the feeling being that that should have its place only in a comic play. Everything is built around the main theme, the lover caught in the toils of a villain, or the lover who has made one mistake and pays dearly for it. And at the close there is due regard for poetic justice in the distribution of rewards and punishments. The feeling of intense depression that comes over one after reading *Lear*, *Hamlet*, or *Ghosts*, is never experienced with the work of Cumberland, Hook, MacDonald and their school.

The tragedies approach a type in the manner in which the events of the plot are complicated and resolved. A formula comes into the mind almost naturally after a reading of a list of these plays, around which they all might be built with certain small changes of costume and scenery: a beautiful lady falls into the clutches of a tyrant. Her lover seeks her rescue

and because his bravery is equally by his rashness he too is captured. The would-be rescuer is condemned to death and his loved one to marriage to the captor. If early England is used as a setting and Saxon chiefs as actors, the drama is *Matilda*; if circumstances take us to the east, *Zoraida* and *Sethona*. But the facts are almost the same in the three cases. Sometimes, as in *Albina*, the conquest by the villain is only a mental one, destroying the happiness of his victim rather than her physical freedom; but again the feeling is the same. Naturally, not all of the tragedies are precisely like this, but so many are like it, so many show such a marked similarity that it seems as if originality had quite fled the stage.

The weakening of the fabric that this suggests is suggested in a much more serious manner by the increasing number of happy endings out of troubles that seem only—could only, we might often say—result in disaster. *The Grecian Daughter*, *Alfred*, *The Countess of Salisbury*, *Zoraida*, *Albina*, *Sethona*, *The Battle of Hastings*, *Cleonice*, and later *The Carmelite*—all these are illustrations of tragedies with successful endings, so far as the protagonists are concerned. Furthermore, where a tragic denouement is achieved, it is often brought about in such an unreasonable manner—take, for instance, the case of Home's *Alonzo* when the persecuted wife stabs herself just when events are clearing her fame to her cruel husband—that there is left in the student's mind the uncomfortable feeling that the dramatist has forced matters to an issue he believes striking rather than allowed the characters to bring about their own happiness or disaster. Is this obscuring of the idea of tragedy, making it really read tragi-comedy, due to the increased acting of Fletcher noticeable as the century waned, or a natural weakness due to the dislike of an unhappy result of the troubles of the hero and their effect upon an audience used to the serious but optimistic sentimental Comedy?

Details of plot development offer no novelties. Matters of exposition are cleared up by a conversation between the heroine and her confidante or the hero and his friend, early in the play. Sometimes, as in *Alonzo*, both methods are used in order to get the two sides of the misunderstanding that forms the entanglement of the play.

There is much narrative throughout the tragedies, which explains why, though much goes on, though there is a vast hurry and bustle and leaving the stage and returning to it—why everything seems uncomfortably static. Combats, whether duels or great battles, are described to, not witnessed by, the audience. In *The Battle of Hastings*, for instance, quite contrary to the old English custom, we are introduced not to the battle itself but to a camp back of the lines of fighting. Wounded are brought in from time to time, and from them we learn of the ebb and flow of the great struggle. In *The Grecian Daughter* the progress of the rescuing army as it batters the walls of Syracuse is related to Euphrasia by a friend as he looks over the parapet. In *Sethona* and *Zoraida* a messenger brings the tidings into camp. This is a typical specimen:

"As round the plain,  
At your command, I posted, from pursuit  
Calling our squadrons, I at a distance saw  
Two females issue from yon western gate  
Chac'd by a troop of Turks, but scarce they seized them  
Ere I arrived, and rescued from their gripe  
The lovely prey; when suddenly from forth  
The city furious rushed a desperate band,  
Led by a chief more terrible and fierce  
Than fancy paints th'inexorable angel,  
When armed with lightnings, he bestrides the whirlwind,  
And marks his path with slaughter. On he rushed,  
With headlong fury, while his brandished sabre,  
Flamed in the front, tremendous as the blade  
Which erst at Ohad's sanguinary list  
Blazed in the prophets grasp, till, overpowered

Like him by mightier numbers, to the ground  
 Disabled, stunned, insensible, he fell,  
 While I th'advantage of the crisis seiz'd  
 And bore away the prize.<sup>1</sup>

What is left of the play is, as with the French drama, the conflict of individuals, a struggle of minds. Feeling perhaps the baldness of the background, however, the playwrights at times substitute for the vanished battles, processions with music and sometimes songs, additions which on the great stages of the time would add the splendor of pageant and compete with the pantomimes and spectacles that were becoming so popular.

The complete lack of violence on the stage is reflected in the language, which strikes one as being flaccid. The heroine is threatened with forced marriage often, but seldom with indignity.

"Enough of argument! Know then this hour  
 Shall make thee mine; shall bend thee to my arms,  
 Shall change these haughty frowns, and vain complaints,  
 To gentle smiles and murmurings of love."<sup>2</sup>

This is the usual speech of command. Even the most vindictive tyrants conduct themselves on the stage with reasonable decorum.

Nor is there aught that is new in plot-making connected with either the situation or development: the long-lost son who returns to his inheritance and discovers himself partly because of his signal bravery, partly because of a courtliness that betrays itself in him despite his rustic upbringing so as to arouse admiration in the hearts of the onlookers and a feeling of kinship in his unknowing mother (all this is suggestive, as are the names of many of the characters, of Mediæval Romance and Heroic Tragedy). Disguises that are seen through

<sup>1</sup> *Zoraida*, Act II, Sc. I.

<sup>2</sup> *Sethona*, Act I, Sc. I.

by some but not recognized by others quite as near in blood to the disguised one, are very common. In *Zenobia*, Rhadamistus is recognized at once by an old retainer, recognized finally by his wife, but not recognized at all by his father, who of all persons would be the one actually most likely to know him. In *Alonzo*, Orisminda feels a deep yearning for her son before she discovers his identity; likewise in *Douglas*. The eighteenth-century dramatist was as fond of this sort of thing as was Harrison Ainsworth in a later generation. Secret marriages, or near marriages, in revenge or to save an imprisoned lover form another very usual device, used again and again as if quite new; and that they apparently satisfied their audiences is testified by the fair success of all these tragedies.

The hero, like the play he figures in, has become a type. He is incredibly brave—this we find in encomiums showered upon him by friends or churlishly allowed by enemies:

"the gallant Edward—  
Who ere the down of youth forsook his cheek,  
Deeds had performed that laurell'd age might envy" <sup>1</sup>

"Proud, uncontrollable, and fierce of spirit,  
Ev'n in his earliest youth, his boyish days,  
When the grim tiger from the thicket rushed,  
Did he once fly? did he not ev'n then  
Dare the encounter? the fell monster gor'd  
His youthful breast, and if his father's arm  
Had not transfix'd the savage to the earth,  
Alzuma then had died. Since that he bore  
The tiger's mark, and ere the down of manhood  
Sprung on his cheek, went from his mother far,  
Grew up implacable of soul, and now  
With dire alarms shakes all the western world."<sup>2</sup>

He is not averse to speaking his own praise. In fact, he is

<sup>1</sup> *Albina*, Act I, Sc. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Alzuma*, Act I, Sc. 1.

rather boastful and swaggering, threatening the world with high-astounding terms.

"He bred me to endure the summer's heat,  
And brave the winter's cold: to swim across  
The headlong torrent, when the shoals of ice  
Drove down the stream. To rule the fierest steed  
That on our mountains run. No savage beast  
The forest yields that I have not encountered."<sup>1</sup>

"If I were chained, unarmed and bed-rid old,  
Perhaps I should revile; but as I am,  
I have no tongue to rail. The humble Norval  
Is of a race who strive not but with deeds.  
Did I not fear to freeze thee with my valour,  
And make thee sink too soon beneath my sword,  
I'd tell thee what thou art. I know thee well."<sup>2</sup>

Interested in great feats of deringdo as he is, he is as clay in the potter's hands in his relations with women. His chief interest in life is love; and in the mazes of the passion the bravest knight becomes a stupid child:

"Well may I blush!  
The soldier, chosen by the King, to lead  
To lead his warlike bands, and carry Britain's thunder  
To holy Zion's gates—he whose rapt bosom,  
No flame, but glory, should confess—  
—He stands before you, with a fainting heart,  
To tell a tale—of love."<sup>3</sup>

His is no ordinary passion either. He loves to an inordinate degree:

"If there be a man  
In either host, Norman or Saracen,  
Whose life to thee is death, that happy man  
Give me to know. This is my only wish.

<sup>1</sup> *Alonso*, Act II, Sc. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Douglas*, Act IV, Sc. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Albina*, Act I, Sc. 1.

Hard by him I will tread the bloody field,  
Happy if I can swell the hero's triumph,  
If I can ward a javelin from his breast,  
Receive the stroke of death for him designed,  
And falling think I spare Tamira's tears."<sup>1</sup>

"Think'st thou a breast susceptible as mine,  
That swells with rapture if thou deign'st to smile,  
Or by a frown is tortured in the extreme;  
Think'st thou a heart like mine will e'er permit  
A conquered slave to win thy least regard?  
Oh there's an avarice in love, that claims  
Each gentle grace, each amiable air,  
Claims the noble hoard of sweets, and will not bear  
A word, a look directed to another."<sup>2</sup>

Even affairs of state are secondary. Many a hero jeopardizes not only his own existence but the safety of his nation to satisfy his heroic passion. Love with him is not the superb reckless gamble of Marc Antony but rather a boyish, selfish enjoyment of beauty. When chidden for his rashness he becomes distinctly pettish, in spite of his gilded language.

"As well thou might'st oppose the bolt of Jove,  
Winged with his wrath. Away—lest in my rage  
Thou too should'st perish."<sup>3</sup>

In general, he is a rather bombastic creature capable of stirring interest only in the breast of the heroine. He is called by many names, suggestive of the old Heroic Tragedy and he has one line that is omnipresent:

"I fly to love and my Orazia."

If a blank were left for the heroine's name any polysyllabic title would do as well.

<sup>1</sup> *The Fair Apostate*, Act II, Sc. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Alsuma*, Act III, Sc. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Sethona*, Act I, Sc. 1.

The Fair to whom he flies is quite a match for him. Naturally beautiful beyond compare, she is also graceful, svelte and womanly to a degree known only in the Eighteenth Century Tragedy. Like Mrs. Radcliffe's heroines, she is given to swooning—there are so many suggestions of Mrs. Radcliffe in these plays that one queries their influence on books like *Udolpho*. Her virtues include nearly all of those listed by St. Paul, holiness, meekness, goodness and truth. She has a fine regard for her purity. She is capable of sublime renunciation, self-immolation. When Matilda, the daughter of Harold, in *The Battle of Hastings* finds herself ignored by Edgar Athel-ine for the more common charms of Edwina, she is bitter for a moment only. Then she weeps with her rival, forgives her, and throws herself on the point of her father's sword.

Sometimes she is capable of actual heroism. In *The Grecian Daughter*, Euphrasia gives suck to her starving parent in his dungeon while the crowd gaze on in admiration. Which suggests the rather patent fact that the average princess is somewhat self-conscious in her virtues as Byron was later on in romantic evil. There is always an eye on the watching populace. She is seldom known to kill herself—it is not quite according to the rules. When overcome by fate the props of her life give way, she goes mad. Even here everything is conducted according to a system. At times the madness is feigned, at times genuine; but it is in all cases quite unlike the mental crash of Elizabethan times.

Not all the characters, of course, are quite so colorless as this: there is a certain fineness in Mandane, in *Cyrus*, or in Orellana, the sister of Alzuma, most of all in Domisminda in *Alonzo*. But it is notable that these women were not the usual stock characters: in two cases they were mothers, in the other a sister, whose love could not depend on the usual emotions; so that the author was forced to work harder and produce something with at least some semblance to actuality.

Generally, however, the heroines who are the centers of interest and action are colorless and forgettable. The age seemed unable to imagine strong women, either wicked women like Lady Macbeth or women strong in their fine womanliness like Cordelia. Strength of character seemed to mean to them much parleying about virtue, and womanliness a fondness for tears and languishing. No wonder Sheridan when he tried his hand at tragedy could do no better than *Pizarro*.

The villain is not without his fascination. Professor Thorndyke finds in him the one link with the past: the scheming, wicked man who entraps a good man and woman and causes their destruction. He cites two instances worth repeating here:

"Revenge, thou art the duty I adore!—  
From thy auspicious shrine I hope a cure  
For the corroding pain that rends my heart.  
The vain Alberti being thus preferred  
By fair Constantia, passeth all enduring!  
Cohedo I have rong'd—another wooer—  
And in his name are such reflections dropped  
As t'wixt the two a duel must provoke—  
My purpose is, who e'er the conqu'or be,  
To reap advantage for my private views."

—This the opening speech of Seybert from *The Heroine of the Cave*, 1774.

"What fools are serious melancholy villains!  
I play a surer game, and screen my heart  
With easy looks and undesigning smiles;  
And while my actions spring from sober thought,  
They still appear th'effect of wild caprice,  
And I the thoughtless slave of giddy chance.  
What but this frankness has engaged the promise  
Of young Orlando, to confide in me  
That secret grief which preys upon his heart?  
'Tis dangerous, indiscreet hypocrisy  
To seem too good: I am the careless Bertrand,  
The honest, undesigning, plain, blunt man."

—the opening soliloquy of Bertrand from *The Fatal Falsehood*, 1779. The latter has some interest because of its Iago-like quality, for the influence of Othello seemed greater than that of any other old play, and we get a faint adumbration of the old motive and villain.

But even the villain seems to have lost his force in the eighteenth century. The large majority of evildoers are not at all like those quoted. They are rather sentimental men with thwarted ambition who wish evil to their rivals, who plot to seize the loved ones they have lost, but who lack either courage or decision in their wickedness. In almost every case they have understudies to do the actual work for them. In many cases they have good angels who try to dissuade them from evil. They are torn between conflicting passions, and generally, whatever the outcome of their plot, are borne down under the intolerable burden of their remorse.

In *Matilda*, for example, the older brother, Morcar, imprisons the affianced of the brother with whom he has quarreled. Though he claps the brother into a dungeon and condemns him to death—a tragedy only averted by the good offices of Morcar's friend—he later releases both of them, reconciles himself to his brother and swears to lead the rest of his life in solitude, "making my peace with Heaven and my Matilda".

In *The Countess of Salisbury*, Raymond, who has held the countess in durance vile for some time, balks at extreme measures suggested to him, and when forgiven by the returning count, wounds himself, overcome by gratitude.

In *The Earl of Warwick* the ungrateful king relents the moment he has imprisoned his patron, and knows no happiness until he is released.

In *Albina*, Gondibert, aware of his wickedness, sees the fires of hell blazing round him until in his remorse he very nearly loses what little mind he started his scheming with.

And so one might go on multiplying examples.

When a dramatist really undertakes an old-fashioned villainous villain the result, as in Editha's case in *Albina*, is rather ludicrous than terrible. Even the last stronghold of the old drama is falling.

Characterization is in general very weak, lacks individualization; so much so that actions often have to be interpreted to the audience by other actors' exclamations or by the actors' own statements rather than their acts. There is too much talking, as Genest says of one play, too little action. This trouble afflicts the whole group; even the talk is not inspiring.

Poverty of inspiration strikes the reader at every stage of the analysis. It is just as noticeable in things that pertain to setting as in character, plot, motive. The sense of the pictorial is conspicuously absent. The average playwright searching for a setting, uses old tombs as scenes, gives a suggestion of the supernatural with the introduction of priests and portents. But for the most part the mere statement that the scene is in Rome, Bithynia or Early England seems quite enough, a slight suggestion like "a Gothic castle" being all that the reader gets by way of help for his setting either at the head of, or in the scene. Apparently the idea of the author is to create certain universal types acting proper parts; who they are and where they come from is not a matter of great importance. We seek in vain that marvelous power of suggestion evident all through Shakespeare, whereby he created a scene in the imagination. Possibly the introduction of new and elaborate scenery is partly accountable for the dearth of historic suggestion or background. At any rate the imagination is left bare in trying to do its work at scene-painting.

Still again a negative is to be recorded. There is no evidence of any appreciation of the grandeur or beauty of nature. Where it is introduced at all it is a part of a mere rhetorical

exercise, an ornament; what a proper gentlemanly hero would use in praising the morning or invoking deity. As in Dryden's time we have set phrases doing duty at all times: the "watery sea", "ebon night", the "reddening concave", "dome of heaven", "broad orb", etc. Nature enters, if at all, in the soliloquies of lovers and warriors, to make picturesque their condition:

"Why shines the sun thus gaily on the world?  
 Why do the feathered habitants of air  
 With melody and cheery songs insult us?  
       . . . . . th'unconscious birds  
 Chant songs of gratitude for good possessed;  
 I know no good—I feel no gratitude—  
 —An outcast, and undone!"<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes it is a set speech:

"How dark the night! The moon hath hid her head,  
 As scorning with her lucid beams to gild  
 This murky business. Thro'umbrageous trees  
 The whistling Eurus speaks in hollow murmurs;  
 And dismal fancy, in yon shadowy aisles,  
 Migh conjure up an hundred phantoms.  
 How strong the impression of our dawning years!  
 The tales of sprites and goblins, that did awe  
 My infancy, all rush upon my mind,  
 And, spite of haughty reason, make it shrink."<sup>2</sup>

There is nothing in either of these typical extracts that suggests that they were written at the time of Burns. Once in a while there is a faint shadowing of Gray, like this:

The gloom of night sits heavy on the world;  
 And o'er the solemn scene such stillness reigns,  
 As 'twere a pause in nature."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Albina*, Act I, Sc. I.

<sup>2</sup> *Albina*, Act III, Sc. I.

<sup>3</sup> *The Grecian Daughter*, Act II, Sc. I.

And there is much dwelling upon the gloom of night and death, the authors of the plays evidently knowing something of Young and Blair.

This mention of two lyrists brings us to the very small illustration of lyric feeling noticeable in Tragedy. There remains the feeling of the Restoration that it is ill-bred to be too individual in the expression of emotion both in the authors and their created people. How refreshing it would be to stumble upon one of the artless Elizabethan songs in the dreary waste of eastern love-making, something like the songs from *As You Like It* that sing a love of nature belonging not alone to the people who sang them, but to the English world at large. But the average song here has the form and color or lack of it of this one:

Beauty as the hour is bright,  
Who in gardens of delight,  
Rob'd with everlasting youth,  
Charms celestial, virgin truth,  
Underneath the luscious vine,  
In pavilions green recline,  
Where believers true enjoy  
Bliss which never knows to cloy."<sup>1</sup>

"Which is pretty but I don't know what it means," as Gilbert would say. It is neither poetry nor sense, yet it can be matched in Home's work or Walpole's. The nearest one gets to lyric feeling is in the fairly dignified soliloquies that fill the tragedies of the time, and which reflect some of the sententiousness of the eighteenth century along with its stoical rather pagan philosophy.

What immediately follows is the meditation—in a tomb—of an Egyptian priest at a time undefined but apparently be-

<sup>1</sup> *Zoraida*, Act V, Sc. 3.

fore the Christian era; yet it would fit very well into the lucubration of some lesser poet two thousand years later:

"This is the house of death! The dreary tomb  
Of Egypt's ancient kings! What now remains  
Of all their glory, but these mould'ring piles,  
And these imperfect, mutilated forms  
Of what they were? The period of my fate  
Will soon be closed. An undistinguished blank  
Perhaps succeeds. What then? To know it not  
Is not to be unhappy. Yet the soul  
Looks thro' the gloomy portal of the grave,  
To happier scenes of immortality.  
O let not such a pleasing hope be vain!  
Eternity, thou awful gulph of time,  
Call down red vengeance on the murderer's head."

Plays taking English subjects just as naturally use Shakespeare as their model, and in a vague, rather unhappy way strive to realize a little of his language and technique of play-writing—so far as does not interfere with the "rules" of the all-wise.

The opening of *Warwick* has a slight flavor of the old chronicle plays.

"Thanks, gracious Heaven! my royal mistress smiles,  
Unusual gladness sparkles in her eye,  
And bids me welcome in the stranger, Joy,  
To his new mansion."

The verse here is happier in every way than the other examples quoted, because it conforms to what might be called the English dramatic idiom. And this speech from a later part of the same play has not only ease but a certain conversational quality missing in the average play-diction of its time:

"You dare not!  
Thou think'st, perhaps, that I shall sue to thee  
For mercy: no; in Margaret of Anjou  
Thou see'st the wife, and daughter of a King.

A spirit not to be subdued; though fallen,  
 Triumphant still; and though a prisoner, free.  
 For know I bear a mind above the reach  
 Of fortune or of Edward—I have lost  
 All I could wish to live for, in my child;  
 And gained, what most I wished to gain, revenge!  
 Or life or death are now indifferent to me."

The drama from which this is taken is for the most part trivial and unhappy; but this bit betrays the reader of Shakespeare.

And in almost all there is noticeable as time goes on a greater flexibility of verse as if dramatists were absorbing unconsciously something of the older school. The most noticeable example of this is Cumberland's *Battle of Hastings*. It is not too good a play. It does not live up to its title to begin with, for the battle is not settled when the fifth act closes; and characterization is not always realized. But there is ease in the reading, and a fluency of technique that suggests at least the good craftsman. Something natural appears in the synchronizing action and character of Shakespeare. Above all, in the language, metre, similes, metaphors there is more of an echo than one is used to in this rather barren time. The result may not be poetry; there is less of the sturdy pedestrian quality than in most of these plays.

EDGAR:

O Love,

Small elf, who by the glow-worm's twinkling light,  
 Fine fairy-fingered child, can'st slip the bolt,  
 While the crammed warden snores, this is thy doing.  
 Lo where she comes, so breaks the morning forth,  
 Blushing and breathing odours—

(Edwina appears.)

All of this hardly suggests *Romeo and Juliet* and

"It is the morn and  
 Juliet is the sun."

But if compared with the average dialogue of *Sethona* or *Alfred* it is not only beautiful, but Shakespearean. If Cumberland is no more romantic than his fellows he is at least a finer artist.

As we look over this entire set of tragedies, this that represents the real spirit of England at the time, we experience a distinct sense of heaviness. There is a complete absence of novelty in theme, plot, and character. Indeed so far as character is concerned there is none; there is no real reading of life. What we get is a set of pale reflections. There is no poetry; scarcely a noteworthy phrase throughout the entire series. It is a tribute to the actors of the period that they could make so much out of so little material. The old English tradition, passed through the alembic of classic formalists, had come to an end. The best that can be said of its last expression is that it is dignified, free from rant, from unnatural passion and clumsy comedy. But the English have never taken kindly to rules. It seemed that as soon as they departed from the old freedom they never displayed the old power. They never fell absolutely into the hands of the formalists, but the chill they did receive from those formalists, coupled with the transformation of theatres into places for pantomime, spectacles, displays of fashion, was sufficient to rob them of the old inspiration. Cumberland's plays represent the last flash of the old tragedy—the tragedy that was written for presentation at a theatre.

## THE ROMANTIC GROUP

The dramas published or acted between *Douglas*, 1757, and *Werter*, 1785, have little to offer in the way of romance, using romance in its broadest acceptation. Half a dozen plays sum up all that can be counted as suggesting anything that quarrels with the fashions of their time. And this is all the more strange when we consider the number of forces at work in the dramatic field that should have turned men's ingenuity to the glory of past literature. Shakespeare was being acted well and continuously by men like Garrick, Macklin and Barry; his plays were mounted vastly oftener than today, and to judge from Genest's comments, to more appreciative audiences. Many of his lesser known dramas were revived from time to time, like *Timon of Athens* and the *Comedy of Errors*, while *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *Lear* seemed to enjoy perennial popularity. Shakespeare weathered all the attacks of Voltaire and the English purists who followed him; indeed the very translators of the French dramatist censured his attack on the greatest name of the English stage. On the surface there was never a time when the author of *Hamlet* enjoyed greater popular homage.

Moreover, the other Elizabethans were coming into their own. Fletcher, who in Dryden's time had two performances to Shakespeare's one, according to Dryden's own testimony, but who had suffered a sad relapse in the eighteenth century, saw many of his plays revived, *Philaster*, *The Maid's Tragedy*, *The Knight of Malta*; some, like *Boaduca*, for the first time in a hundred and fifty years. Massinger appears again on the play-lists as the century grows old. And editions of

Fletcher and Massinger are published in 1778 and 1779 respectively. *Tamerlane* apparently is still popular. The *Silent Woman* and *The Alchemist* are presented. Toward the time of *Werter* there is a recrudescence of Middleton. Surely here is a public that may be appealed to in a romantic way; and it seems equally reasonable to postulate a few dramatists who, in spite of the formulae and syllogisms propounded by the rule-makers, will reflect something of what they have seen on the stage and something of the thought that in other fields is finding expression in Cowper, Crabbe, Blake and Burns. Yet the general result is negative, distressingly negative. Now and again a play appears whose plot has been borrowed—to use the polite word—from one of the older generation; but in the hands of its re-doer it somehow loses most of its power or charm. Nor is there anyone, apparently, who is independent enough poetically and possessed of sufficient dramatic ability to produce a play in a free form and with strong romantic feeling.

An examination of some of the later eighteenth-century alterations of Shakespeare is not without its interest, and may have its suggestion as to why no better original work was done by the score or so of tragedians who enjoyed their fame in Sheridan's time.

In 1763 Garrick altered and presented the *Midsummer Night's Dream*. The whole of the delicious drollery of the mock-play was omitted, and the remainder turned into something of an opera with thirty-three songs. This not succeeding very well with the public, it was withdrawn, cut down; it remained the "Fairy Tale" with Theseus and all the serious characters withdrawn, and was used as a one-act after-piece to bolster up the serious work of the evening. Genest, in commenting upon the original change, finds that "the dialogue has been judiciously curtailed", and criticizes the orig-

inal version for such vulgar errors and absurdities as Athenians who talk about Diana's nuns, and going a-Maying; or the impossibility of a Duke of Athens before chivalry was known, and more strictures of a like kind. Here we come across some of the views of the time and later — limitations, present-day people would term them — reflecting on the one hand the greatest actor of his time, and on the other a pains-taking dramatic scholar. A man interested in romance would be prone to ask what matter it makes how many anachronisms appear in a play like the *Midsummer Night's Dream*. As a matter of fact, the land of romance knows no such thing as time, and therefore is a stranger to anachronism. Carpaccio's painting is beautiful even though it is full of incorrect details — perhaps very slightly because of them. But Genest, writing in a very much later period than Garrick—1832—is so much worried by details that the poetry loses much of its value for him. As for Garrick, we can only surmise that the mock-play was omitted as is suggested in the review because it smacked of low comedy; but it is much more difficult to understand how a man of his undoubted taste could have suffered its transformation into a poor opera. Is it possible that all the quality of faërie was lost on him? He was a student of average human nature, an actor of extraordinary human nature; it is possible that pucks and fairies seemed puerile and childish.

*Lear* was offered in 1768 by Garrick and Colman, with alterations by the latter. Colman was a serious producer who had a real respect for the earlier stage. He had sufficient interest to edit both Fletcher and Massinger, and his attitude toward Shakespeare was one of absolute veneration. Yet his production of *Lear* shows the peculiarities of the time as completely as Garrick's changes in the earlier comedy. *Lear* had suffered more than once at the hands of later poets and poet-

asters. The most popular alteration, to judge from the number of presentations, was that of Tate, which changed entirely the force of the original. Tate found Shakespeare's play a "heap of jewels, unstrung and unpolished". It was his good fortune, he says, to light upon "one expedient that was wanting in the regularity and probability of the tale, which was to run through the whole—a love betwixt Edgar and Cordelia, that never changed words with each other in the original". The result, of course, could hardly help to heighten the effect of the story. Colman had the taste to be angry with the degradation of the masterpiece, and in his own production tried to get back to the original lines and most of the original scenes. But he has his own way of going about the restoration. "To reconcile the catastrophe of Tate to the original story was the first grand object which I proposed to myself in this alteration." Apparently it was good business to retain the popular love-story in order to give the public the "consistent and rational entertainment" that he claims as the pre-eminent duty of the manager. His purpose is clear. "*Romeo and Juliet*, *Cymbeline*, and *Every Man in His Humour* have long been refined of the dross that hindered them from being current with the public, and I have now endeavored to purge the *Tragedy of Lear*."

In the version that results he rejects as utterly improbable Gloucester's imagining, though a blind man, that he had leaped down Dover Cliff, and omits it "without scruple". He confessed to an idea of retaining the Fool, but after most serious consideration was convinced that "such a character in a tragedy would not be endured on the modern stage". Here is a long foreword from a successful manager that is illuminating for its point of view. He enjoys the poetry of Shakespeare but refuses to accept him as he is, misses the force of the Fool, one of the greatest characters in the play,

and rejects certain scenes because they form a strain on credulity. Like some others, he seemed to lack the extra-imagination necessary for great work, the romantic imagination that transcends everyday things. And so, while he gives a fair rendition of the original play, getting rid of much of Tate's alloy, his practical sense forced the retention of the absurd happy ending, in which Lear, a broken-down old man in gaol, has sufficient strength to knock down two of his captors with a pike and secure liberty and happiness. This is not hopeful as an index of either the public or their managers. Unquestionably as Genest remarks, Cibber and Tate were accepted regularly in place of the originals, though many of the other alterations died as they should.

*Timon of Athens* was altered in 1771 by Cumberland, who shortened, but did not materially damage, the earlier part of the play, but added a fifth act which brought the money back to Timon, gave his daughter a husband, made the town welcome the old spendthrift under the compulsion of Alcibiades, and completely destroyed the underlying philosophy of that strong, unpleasant play.

Garrick altered *Hamlet* so that the grave was omitted on the stage; so that Hamlet did not murder the King; and so that his mother went mad instead of drinking the poison. He likewise altered *Philaster* so that the impetuous hero of that romance did not actually wound Bellario, the page suffering in the endeavor to intercede between his master and the irate mob; this being a more gentlemanly and dramatic state of affairs.

The old dramatists, then, are in the hands of unquestionable enthusiasts whose enthusiasm is of their time. They resemble the architects who in 1840 restored Canterbury Cathedral by removing the Norman tower on the west front and substituting another that "matched" the later perpendicular one.

And it is to be noted that the excisions are almost always of those passages which the average reader of today would call distinctly romantic. The managers and altering-playwrights with all their zeal were weighted down by the proprieties of the purists and the demands of the pit. Shakespeare was offered regularly, but often on the same night with a pantomime or spectacle. And apparently everybody was satisfied. It is a good thing to take all these matters into consideration in a survey of romantic content of plays of the time.

From among the many tragedies that were offered in the span of years indicated above the following may be said to have some romantic quality: *Douglas*, 1759, and *The Fatal Discovery*, 1769, by Home; *Cleone*, Dodsley, 1759; *The Mysterious Mother*, 1768, and *The Count of Narbonne*, by Walpole (the latter dramatized by Jephson); *Braganza*, 1775, and *The Law of Lombardy*, 1778, by Jephson; *Percy*, 1777, and *The Fatal Falsehood*, 1779, by More; *The Carmelite*, 1784, by Cumberland; *The Captives*, 1786, by Delap.

These plays do not belong together. They do not in any sense form a "school". Nor can they be subdivided into smaller groups because of their following some particular bent of romanticism. They stand simply for a set of isolated tragedies significant in differing degrees because departing from accepted contemporary standards; and earnest of bigger things possibly to come.

On the list are some that have purely an adventitious interest. *The Captives*, by Delap, is the later work of a classical student interested in Greek Tragedy. He felt the lure, however, of the Ossianic legend and laid the scene of his last work in old Caledonia. It is too much to expect anything romantic from anyone of Delap's training and ideals. He probably had not the slightest idea of deviating from anything old except the setting. The result at any rate is practically a mod-

ern version of Euripides with the poetic northern background. The people talk and act quite as in classic times and classic tragedy. The only suggestion of something new is the use of musical names like *Everallin*, Erragon, Malvina. No use is made of the great chance for natural magic. The poetry is stiff and unnatural. But the play has its message. The new things—or old things—apparently mean more to those who read plays than to those who see or act them. This, like other plays of a limited group, suggests that the literary drama is a thing of the past—it still attracts mainly antiquarians, pedagogues, dilletanti who are not in regular communion with the acting stage. Those who write new literary tragedy may succeed, and they may not. In any case the tendency toward closet-drama becomes noticeable among the greater poets of the succeeding generation.

In this class likewise have been included the dramas of Robert Jephson. One of these will be considered in connection with Walpole, since it is the dramatization of his novel. The others are classed here more because their author considered himself a follower of the Elizabethan school than for a more definite reason.

*Braganza, Julia* (a later play), and *The Law of Lombardy* go back to Italy and Spain for their stories and settings, in this respect at least following old custom. Their type of fable is faintly reminiscent of Massinger and some of the later Renaissance poets.

*The Law of Lombardy* concerns two women and two men. One of the women—a princess—is sought by two men, Bireno and Polydore, by the first from motives of ambition, by the second from honest love. Bireno finds that the princess detests him and has given her heart to his rival. He decides on revenge. He tells Polydore he has been on terms of intimacy with the princess and undertakes to prove his assertion. Poly-

dore sees him enter the window of the palace by moonlight, sees him embrace someone who by her clothes can be none other than the woman he has loved. As a matter of fact the whole thing is a hoax, the woman in the case being Almira, a creature of Bireno's whom he has formerly seduced.

By the Law of Lombardy a woman accused of incontinence was punished with death, but allowed a champion to prove her honor. Bireno, in order to cover up his villainy, has his accomplice set upon in the forest by thugs. They murder her just as Polydore, alarmed by her cries, comes on the scene; but before she dies she tells the truth about the scandalous story. Polydore appears as the champion of the princess, and rescues her.

The plot has been rehearsed at length because it is very different from those of most of the contemporaries. Jephson is original at least in rejecting the hackneyed love story, taking a different theme and a plot suggestive of the Elizabethans. His plot, in fact, is so suggestive in part of *Much Ado About Nothing* that it seems at first as if that play had been uncere- moniously borrowed from. The author insisted that the suggestions came from Ariosto. The fact remains in any case that he found more inspiration in Shakespeare than did many of his fellow-playwrights.

*Braganza* is a fair sample of Jephson's work for study purposes. The scene is Renaissance Portugal, whose fortunes are at their ebb, and whose government is groaning under the heel of the Spaniard. The play vitalizes a plot for the overthrow of the tyrant viceroy Velasquez, which is successful and finally places Branganza on the throne of a free country. For the average person the value of this drama is not its intrinsic merit — it has little of that — but simply the use of the old chronicle motive of patriotism as the backbone of the play. The love interest is practically absent. What holds the stage

is the unselfish interest of all the patriots, but particularly Louise of Branganza, in the fate of their common country.

The drama opens with a street scene not entirely unlike those in the Shakespeare historical plays, with people passing to and fro—in the background the market-place with its bustle. The Spanish chieftain enters with his train and we get the idea of the story in the comments of some of the lookers-on. The rest of the acts are a rather dull, static unfoldment of the success of the conspiracy. Two of these incidents are fairly dramatic: that in which the Spaniard persuades a priest to poison Branganza with the consecrated wafer; and that in the last scene where Velasquez, a captive, seizes Louise and threatens to stab her unless his freedom is granted. This last incident is taken from *Distressed Innocence*, 1692; in other words, the tragedian is eclectic and will accept ideas from any source. His idea of what things were Elizabethan and romantic was probably more wide than deep.

The prologue announces the author thus:

"Vig'rous he comes, and warm from  
Shakespeare's school."

—which Genest suggests tartly is "an useful piece of information, as it is what one would not have thought of, without being told".

There is not much of the Shakespearean school in Jephson. But even small things are gratifying in a search like this. Here is a man at all events trying to do things as Shakespeare did them; and there is the faintest promise of revolt in the motives, stories and background that are used.

Richard Cumberland has left one tragedy among his many efforts that shows some traces of the romantic movement. Cumberland was a clever, versatile, but not ordinarily an inspired craftsman. His work includes sentimental comedy and

sentimental tragedy; it is always fluent, seldom contemptible, seldom memorable. *The Carmelite* is his nearest approach to anything original and romantic.

The story takes place in the England of the Middle Ages: St. Valori, a knight who has supposedly been murdered in the Pyrenees, is wrecked on the coast of England near the castle occupied by his wife, in company with the man who sought his life. Hildebrand, the ostensible criminal, is ignorant of St. Valori's identity, thinking him merely the Carmelite of his disguise; and it is to the Carmelite that he confesses his crime and his remorse. He has profited by his evil work; has seized all the Norman territories of Matilda the widow. She has given up herself in mourning for her lord and hate of the Norman; she has appealed to the King for justice, and according to custom has been asked to send a champion to represent her in the field against the robber baron. For this purpose she has chosen Montgomery, brought up to this time as a mere page, and suddenly discovers his identity to him. To all else he remains a page as before; and the favoritism for one apparently so lowly born stirs resentment in the castle. St. Valori seeing her affection for the young man concludes she has secretly married and damns her as faithless. He sends back a trinket given him by his wife on his departure. Matilda sees this, interviews the monk-husband, and just as he is about to stab the supposed usurper of his bed finds him to be his own son. There is consequent reconciliation and happiness.

There is more of a change here from the general run of plays than would appear on the surface. We no longer deal with the love of a young man for a young woman—the theme of *The Carmelite* is the continued, abiding love of a wife for a husband she thinks long dead—a cherishing of the ghosts of departed things; and with it the pure affection of a mother for her child.

The scene, too, has its novelty. It is laid in the chivalric era; and there is a real effort on the part of the author to give us some of the pageant of life in those times, its superstition and its romance.

Good use is made of the remorse that dogs the criminal night and day, conjuring up dreams, making everything seen in his waking hours a horrid reminder of his guilt; until he is turned into a craven wight instead of the cruel knight of old:

“I do perceive  
The hand of Heaven hangs over me and my house;  
Why am I childless else? seven sons swept off  
To their untimely graves; their wretched mother  
By her own hand in raging phrenzy died;  
And last behold me here, forlorn, abandoned,  
At life's last hour, before her surly gate,  
Deaf to my hungry cries: and shall we rank  
Such judgments in the casual course of things?  
To me 'tis palpable that heavenly justice  
Puts nature by, and to the swelling sum  
Of my uncanceled crimes adds all the lives  
Of them who sunk this morning.”<sup>1</sup>

All of this he confides to St. Valori. Terrors beset him:

“Sleep is my horror; then the furies rise;  
Then pale St. Valori appears before me:  
Trembling I wake, cold dews upon my limbs,  
And my couch floats with tears . . . .  
Methought but now by shipwreck I was plunged  
Into the foaming ocean; on the shore  
Your figure stood with beckoning hand outstretched  
To snatch me from the waves; cheered with the sight,  
Through the white surf I struggled; with strong arm  
You raised me from the gulph; joyful I ran  
To embrace my kind preserver—when at once  
Off fell your habit, bright in arms you stood,  
And with a voice of thunder cried aloud,  
‘Villain avaunt! I am St. Valori!’  
Then pushed me from the cliff; down, down I fell,  
Fathoms on fathoms deep, and sunk forever.”

<sup>1</sup> Act I, Sc. 1.

Both the character and the conversation may be unremarkable absolutely; but the passage has decided interest in its time as a foreshadowing of the psychology used with such power by Coleridge in the *Ancient Mariner*; and it is noticeable that there is almost nothing of the kind contemporary with *The Carmelite*.

There is another slight suggestion of the Middle Ages in the use of the curse :

" Rise, Rise, ye waves ! blow from all points, ye winds,  
And whelm the accursed plank that wafts him over  
In fathomless perdition ! Let him sink,  
He and his hateful crew ! let none escape,  
Not one ; or if one let him only breathe  
To tell his tale and die ! "

Again we have rather pseudo-mediaevalism than genuine ; still it is a departure, and worth noting.

The author is not big enough to rise entirely beyond his time. In many respects his play is disappointing. The young knight is still the ecstatic, overwrought gentleman to whom we are used. When he discovers his birth and finds a mother his words have a strangely familiar sound :

" Oh thou maternal softness ! hear thy son,  
Thus kneeling, bathing with his tears thy feet,  
Swear to cast off each fond alluring thought,  
The world, its honors, pleasures, and ambition ;  
Here in this solitude to live with thee,  
To thee alone devoted." <sup>1</sup>

Yet even this is better than most of the filial affection of its time, and more sincere.

Nor is it natural to suppose that a man capable of such complete turpitude as <sup>Lucifer</sup> St. Valeri would in the end become not only an abject coward but a repentant Christian ; or that the

<sup>1</sup> Act II, Sc. I.

Knight whose life he almost took, whose happiness he really murdered, would grasp his hand and give him his benediction. It is pleasant to consider, but is it life, particularly mediæval life? It would seem as if the author demanded a happy closure to his play. He had read Steele, possibly Kotzebue: even the worst of crimes may be forgiven. And both the reading of the spirit and the moral value of the drama are injured.

Yet when all is said, *The Carmelite* had much to recommend it. The character of Matilda is particularly good. Sometimes she is reminiscent of Lady Randolph in *Douglas*; and like that other heroine she is best in the scenes with her son, which are domestic and affecting. The language, too, is free from the lush quality that undistinguishes so much work of the time; it is direct and at times picturesque.

If Cumberland had been a young man when he wrote *The Carmelite*, he might have had a message to the state theatre of his time. As it is he has an interest historical rather than intrinsic.

Hannah More's two plays find place here too; partly because of their source, partly because of some departures in character representation.

*The Fatal Falsehood* shows the persistence of the Iago tradition; a whole company of people in the toils of a sleek criminal. The play involves mistaken killings, madness and much of the dramatic machinery of its own time in addition to the few suggestions of an earlier period.

*Percy* is a more impressive play and better worth analysis as a sample of its creator's power. It is founded, like *Douglas*, on an old ballad. The time is that of chivalry; the background the border country, the scene of so much history-making.

It is a tale of jealousy. Elwina had been affianced to Percy

by her father, but because of a quarrel in the chase the match had been broken off; and when Percy had left for the Holy Land the girl had been forced into the arms of Douglas. Her husband has realized that she has given him only lip service and, not knowing the early romance, becomes suspicious and seeks proofs for his unreasoning jealousy. These he finds when Percy returns from his crusade and seeks an audience with the girl he still believes a virgin and true to him. Percy and Elwina have an interview, and Elwina tries to recover a scarf given to him in their childish intimacy. Her lover is captured by the suspicious <sup>Percy</sup> Percy, who has seen a note mentioning the scarf and interprets it against the seventh commandment. A duel is arranged, Douglas seeing to it that if he shall be killed his wife shall take poison; she is not to fall into the hands of his enemy. But Percy is overcome, Elwina goes mad, and Douglas, finding his suspicions unjust, kills himself in remorse.

The play has a mediæval inspiration, but any hope of romantic atmosphere inspired by this is rudely shattered. There is not a gleam of anything romantic in the whole tragedy. The love of the wholesome out-of-doors that fills the ballads and makes up so large a part of the life of the Englishman, is not noticeable. We feel almost that Hannah More was near-sighted, so little suggestion is there of anything picturesque. "A Gothic Hall" is her only suggestion for setting. In action there is a certain freedom. The rivals at least fight on the stage. Yet when the final duel comes, in which one participant must forfeit his life, Miss More, true to eighteenth-century tradition, draws a discreet curtain; and we have the tale from the lips of the survivor. Hannah More was a great admirer of Dr. Johnson. She is hardly likely to stray far from the lines he prescribes. Certainly *Percy* is orthodox.

Versification is wooden and sudorific save in a few lines, which seem to have been taken from the ballad original.

"One summer's morn my father chased the deer  
On Teviot Hills."

"Some moons have now completed their slow course  
Since my sad marriage."

The only novelty is in the reading of the characters of Douglas and his wife.

It is natural, in reading the tale of a husband's jealousy, to think of *Othello*. Certainly, judging by the context of the play, Hannah More has read the Shakespearean play. But Douglas bears little resemblance to Othello. He is gloomy and suspicious without the aid of a villain; a casuist, lacking both the decision and the fineness of temper of the Moor. Douglas has the rashness of Lear in Othello's situation.

This is a most rigorous husband, quite different in his standards from the usual run of mediæval spouses. He asks no proof like his Moorish predecessor:

"Will it content me if her person's pure?  
No, if her alien heart dotes on another,  
She is unchaste, were not that other Percy.  
Let vulgar spirits basely wait for proof,  
She loves another—'tis enough for Douglas."<sup>1</sup>

Yet, after her taking the poison, he cries out,

"Thou dear wronged innocence . . . .  
Fair spirit, I loved thee—Oh Elwina!"

—a contradictory character somewhat like the unhealthy-minded protagonists of the modern Scandinavian school, savage, yet weak in spite of it all.

Elwina, likewise, is a new type of Desdemona; new type of ballad-woman; a mediæval girl with a puritan soul. Somehow she is exactly the heroine we would expect from a mas-

<sup>1</sup> Act II, Sc. I.

<sup>2</sup> Act V, Sc. I.

culine woman like Hannah More, well read in the Bible, and the child of a clergyman with distinctly puritanical leanings. Elwina has more of *Clarissa Harlowe* in her than of *Desdemona* or *Juliet*; and she owns a strength of mind foreign to any of those women.

Her chastity is almost offensive. She preaches it while she acts it. She reminds one of the Christian Endeavor girl in a small town who has never walked in the paths of the ungodly and, quite satisfied with her rectitude, is willing to talk about it for the beatification of others. At times she seems simple and unaffected:

"Percy, dost thou know  
The cruel tyranny of tenderness?"

or again

"I loved thee most when most I wronged thee."

But is the same act we get some such declamation as this:

"Percy, hear me.  
When I was robbed of all my peace of mind,  
My cruel fortune left me still one blessing,  
One solitary blessing, to console me:  
It was my fame. 'Tis a rich jewel, Percy,  
And I must keep it spotless, and unsoiled."

At times she is like Addison—and Hannah More:

"My gentle friend, what is there in a name?  
The means are little where the end is kind.  
If it disturb thee do not call it poison;  
Call it the sweet oblivion of my cares,  
My balm of woe, my cordial of affection,  
The drop of mercy to my fainting soul,  
My cup of bliss, my passport to the skies."

Here, again, is some of the classic sententiousness:

"Draw near, ye awful instruments of fate,  
Dire instruments of posthumous revenge!"

She is distinctly self-conscious, her death suggesting that of Addison. "I would address me to the throne of grace," she says as she retires to pray. And when about to die she calls her family to her side, kisses them dutifully, forgives everyone who has wronged her, and, uttering her salutation to Heaven, dies peacefully.

It is hard to "place" *Percy*. It is unquestionably different from its fellow plays. Equally unquestionably it is not romantic in spirit. The true explanation probably is that someone accidentally taking a mediæval theme cast it in a fairly regular mould; but in working up the characters read into them her Puritan ideas, so that Douglas and the wife whom he always addresses as Madam are really late middle-class English dissenters with the primness and talk on etiquette that becomes so common toward the end of that century. It is no easy matter, however, to understand why the play is considered romantic outside this variation of character, the old theme, and a possible Shakespearean suggestion. There is more romance in one verse of *Auld Robin Grey* than in the whole play of *Percy*.

The motive of jealousy that is at the back of More's play is also the mainspring of Robert Dodsley's *Cleone*. The author was a remarkable man, something of a character: bookseller, farce-writer, antiquarian, the friend of Pope and of Johnson. He published a volume of old plays and had a reading knowledge of earlier literature not over-common in his time, coupled with not mean literary ability.

*Cleone* (1758) deserves mention in this list and is much better as a play apart from its historical interest than many others produced at the time. Johnson remarked that, if Otway had written *Cleone*, no other of his pieces would have been remembered. Johnson's criticisms are not always unbiased, but the coupling of Otway's name with Dodsley's is not without value.

*Cleone* is a French lady living in an undefined time during the Middle Ages when fighting was still in progress near Avignon between the Saracens and the followers of Christ. The leader of the Christian host is a brave soldier named Siffroy. His duties have kept him long away from his home, and during his campaigns his mind has been poisoned against Cleone by his good friend Glanville—somewhat after the method of *Othello*. Glanville succeeds in casting suspicion on his prey, in drawing her from her home, in killing her child and her supposed confederate, and in wounding her and driving her mad. But as in *Othello*, one or two strands of the criminal conspiracy are left unravelled. The villain is tracked down just as Cleone, mad and dying in the forest, is found by her husband, who realizes his rashness and kills himself in anguish and contrition.

This play immediately strikes one as better than the majority, though it is another matter to explain just why. There is little poetry in it; there are few rememberable lines. But it has one thing absolutely unusual in the mid-eighteenth century, truth to life and naturalness of conversation. There is a sincerity about it that is absolutely convincing.

Glanville is of the same family as Iago without being a shadow. He is resourceful, direct in speech, ambitious, and, like Iago, not overwhelmed by his defeat. Siffroy is thoroughly easy to understand, true to his age, impetuous, rash, but provocative of real sympathy; and Cleone has at times a little of that beautiful artlessness that recalls the later Elizabethans.

It is in the matter of drama, however, of action, that this play is particularly noteworthy. There are little touches of premonition here and there, as when Cleone, talking with Paulet and wondering about the absence of news from him, feels intuitively that something is amiss. Or again when

alone in the forest with her child she is terrified by the very blackness around her into thinking her enemies are lying in wait. These details are not explainable; but any reader notices the lifelike quality of the play so soon as he starts with it. Action is rapid and natural, and though the child is actually slain off-stage, the pity of it is felt as the mother finds the little body and bears it away with her, singing a strain as her mind gives way.

Here is one man among them all who seemed to understand the real power to make puppets, actors seem like the creatures of real life. With an Elizabethan theme, a thoroughly Elizabethan villain, and a hero and heroine not unworthy of the Shakespearean age, he is either a later manifestation of Otway or a real revival of the spirit of the time still earlier.

Home wrote two romantic tragedies. He should have written more. The friend of Blair, a dweller apart from the literary dogmas of the cities, and an enthusiastic reader of good literature, he had everything in his favor to produce great romance. Yet most of his works are starched and dull, and from among the mass of them only two emerge that have any significance, *Douglas* and *The Fatal Discovery*.

*Douglas* has been extravagantly praised. Hume, perhaps not an impartial judge, Gray, "Christopher North"—all have spoken of it in glowing terms; and as an acting drama it held its own for seventy-five years. Yet one's first impression of it is not one of great enthusiasm; one wonders why the laurels were heaped on it of old. It seems "stagey" with the rhetoric of the high-school boy; and young Norval is no more real than many a less celebrated hero. It is not until after reading the great mass of plays of its era and then rereading Home's masterpiece that one realizes the hope it engendered in 1757 that a new day of romance had arrived.

It has one unquestionable trait that distinguished *Cleone*—



sincerity. The mawkish love of the average drama is supplanted by mother love. There is a feeling through all of brooding melancholy; the language, though artificial, is musical and easy of speech. Most of these sensations are experienced at the first entry of Lady Randolph.

"Ye woods and wilds, whose melancholy gloom  
Accords with my soul's sadness, and draws forth  
The voice of sorrow from my bursting heart,  
Farewell awhile; I will not leave you long;  
For in your shades I deem some spirit dwells,  
Who from the chiding stream or groaning oak,  
Still hears and answers to Matilda's groan.  
Oh, Douglas! Douglas! if departed ghosts  
Are e'er permitted to review this world,  
Within the circle of that wood thou art,  
And with the passion of immortals, hear'st  
My lamentation, hear'st thy wretched wife  
Weep for her husband slain, her infant lost."

"To thee I lift my voice; to thee address  
The plea which mortal ear has never heard.  
Oh disregard me not! Though I am called  
Another's now, my heart is wholly thine.  
Incapable of change, affection lies  
Buried, my Douglas, in thy bloody grave."

Among the characters, Lady Randolph is pre-eminent. Glenalvon is a stock villain, Lord Randolph adequate for his part but no more. Douglas himself is not on the stage long enough for us to form an opinion of him. He appears usually as the piece-speaking ranter, his discourse having an air of belligerency about it that with its garniture of words would undoubtedly give it attraction. It is not until the death scene that the pathos of the young warrior taken away from life just as he was wakening to its glory, is really felt:

"I have not long been Douglas;  
Oh destiny! hardly thou deal'st with me!  
Unknown I die; no tongue shall speak of me."

But his mother is the character that one really remembers. Tragedy seems to overshadow her. Her life is doomed. Always there is the thought of her dead husband, her lost son. When her living spouse sings the praises of war, she turns away in sadness, seeing only the desolated homes :

"They go forth  
Gay in the morning, as to summer sport;  
When evening comes, the glory of the morn,  
The youthful warrior is a clod of clay."

She refuses to be comforted by the kindly consolation of her friend. Always there is the thought of the emptiness of life, made more poignant by the sight of young Norval. When she finds a moment of ecstasy with her long-lost child there is the premonition that it is not to last for long. She realizes the mortality of his wound before he is aware of it himself, and there is the cry of anguish :

"There is no hope!  
And we must part! The hand of death is on thee!  
Oh my beloved child! Oh Douglas! Douglas!"

There is much of the Celtic spirit here in the abiding melancholy, that lends the play dignity and poetry. We have only to compare *Douglas* with *Percy*, two plays with much of the same ideas, to understand the difference between fire and ice, between romance and something very different.

The author must have exhausted himself with his sensation-play. His later work sometimes attempts a return to the same theme and feeling, but not successfully. When he does achieve once more something in the romantic vein it is Ossian who is his inspiration, not the natural mediævalism of the ballads.

*The Fatal Discovery* is, as Genest remarks, a thoroughly good tragedy. It is enacted among the isles to the north of

Ireland in the ancient times, and is built about the idea of a girl affianced to one chieftain, and then, under the belief that her lover is dead, forced to marry another, only to find too late that the tale was a lie. This is practically the theme of Percy—a contest between love and duty, with disaster at the end. The characters, though talking too much alike, are adequate, dignified. The background is hazily picturesque as in a dream or the reading of Malory. And the verse has the biblical music of Ossian, monotonous at times, but declamatory in the better sense, and remarkably easy to read.

Home's romanticism was of the Celtic variety. There is not a trace of Elizabethan feeling in any of his work. These two plays belong in the class of Chatterton and Percy's *Reliques* as, if one must use a rather unhappy word, rococo romanticism, in the style of the building of Strawberry Hill.

Outside of Home, perhaps more than Home, the outstanding figure of the time from the standpoint of dramatic revolt is Horace Walpole. A dilettante, so fortunate that he could have no definite purpose in life, he yet contrived to be very useful to humanity. He was a patron of art, of literature, a writer of admirable letters, and a fairly broad-minded critic. It is almost startling, however, to think that his one drama should be perhaps the most powerful and least pleasant of any written during his time.

Two dramas might be credited to the author of *The Castel of Otranto* — *The Count of Warbonne* and *The Mysterious Mother*. The former is a dramatization by Jephson of his novel and is full of good things. But it is Walpole's own tragedy that is particularly important.

*The Mysterious Mother* is founded on an old tale of incest. It is a theme used by the Elizabethans, handled in this case with fine restraint and dignity. The plot is strong, the mystery being preserved until the end when it is revealed in a great final scene.

Here is a play that is strangely suggestive of a knowledge of the stage in Shakespeare's time. It starts out with the coming of Florian, the friend of banished Edmund, to the gate of the castle of Norbonne. He seeks information from the porter, a facetious, rather ribald old soul like his literary ancestors, and like them devoted to the fortunes of his house.

"Thou knowst my lady, then! Thou knowst her not.  
Canst thou in hair-cloth vex those dainty limbs?  
Canst thou on reeking pavements and cold marble,  
In meditation pass the livelong night?  
Canst mortify that flesh, my rosy minion,  
And bid thy rebel appetite refrain  
From goblets foaming wine, and costly viands?  
These are the deeds, my youngster, must draw down  
My lady's ever heaven-directed eye."<sup>1</sup>

This is ready speech, and easy exposition.

As in *Douglas* the gloom of impending tragedy hangs over the castle. Indeed the most striking feature of this remarkable work is the way in which it anticipates the work of Poe and, in a lesser degree, of Mrs. Radcliffe, in creating an atmosphere charged with gloom. It has that totality of effect so much talked about by the author of the *House of Usher*, with much more power. Every little detail leads to the climax. The castle is gloomy to begin with. The porter whispers tragedy. Portents are seen by servants and children. Storms, the dialogue of unscrupulous confessors, above all the secret sorrow of the remarkable central figure, work cumulatively to a great crisis.

The characters are good, well defined—even the girl Adeliza has less of sentimentalism about her than we might expect. But the real feature of the play—that to which one always is drawn—is the romance of mystery. In addition to the things

<sup>1</sup> Act I, Sc. 1.

already noted, there is an artful use of dumb-show from time to time. There is a suggestion of the wars of the heretics and tragedies of mediæval France — all of them helping the gloom that settles on the doomed castle. And when the Countess finally sinks down under her secret, her mind having given way, it is not the stage madness of the conventional heroine that greets us, but something at once appealing and terrible. She reveals bit by bit the events of the night of her crime, finally gathers her failing strength together, makes her confession and kills herself.

The dialogue is rapid and epigrammatic, and if it is urged that the play is stationary the only answer is that hardly anyone at this time seemed to have a natural dramatic sense. Even as it is the play leaves a stronger impression than the rest in the romantic group. If Walpole had been a poorer man—but this is idle speculation.

## SUMMARY

A summary of the search for romanticism in this first period gives results practically negative. The forces making for freedom of form and thought, the forces turning interest back to the great past seemed hardly to touch the drama. Some playwrights were so immersed in the classics that they refused to look beyond them for inspiration. The majority produced lame variations of old themes with French decorations. Of the few plays that show anything that is new *Cleone*, *Douglas*, and *The Mysterious Mother* alone are noteworthy. Each of these is romantic in the true sense. Two of them, *Cleone* and *The Mysterious Mother*, have strong suggestions of the Elizabethan drama. But as a whole it must be admitted that the revival that did come to the stage is little more apparent by 1785 than it was at the time of George Lillo.

The reasons for this purely negative result are many, and perhaps not worth repeating. It may have been as the author of *Zoraida* states in his prologue, a self-consciousness on the part of the playwrights that froze any new inspiration. It may have been a recurrence of the deadness after Chaucer, when his imitators sought so much after likeness to the master that they had nothing to say for themselves. Or it may simply have been that the age was hopelessly undramatic; its genius ran to the novel and the lyric. When a man had something to say he usually put it in one of those forms; and the drama became much of a by-product. At any rate we come back to the original finding that there was practically no revival of Elizabethan feeling in the drama prior to the advent of the German influence and the French Revolution.



